# A HISTORY

OF

# ENGLISH POETRY

BY

W. J. COURTHOPE, M.A.

VOL. I

THE MIDDLE AGES: INFLUENCE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE—THE ENCYCLOPÆDIC EDUCATION OF THE CHURCH—THE FEUDAL SYSTEM

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# A HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

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# TABLE SHOWING CONTEMPORARY POETS OF ENGLAND, FRANCE, AND ITALY,

## FROM 1150—1509.

| King of England. | Normandy, England, and Scotland. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. | France. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. | Italy. | Date of Birth. | Date of Death. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Henry II. | Robert Wace | ?1110 | 1184 | Arnaud de Marueil, Bertrand de Born, Bernard de Ventadour, Geoffrey Rudel — School of the Troubadours | 12th century | | | | |
| | Benoît de Ste. More | — | — | Chrestien de Troyes | — | 1191 | | | |
| | | | | Guillaume de Lorris | 1195 | 1260 | | | |
| | | *circ.* | | Thibaut IV. | 1201 | 1253 | | | |
| John | Marie of France | 1200-1230 | | Rutebœuf | *circ.* | 1250 | | | |
| | Ormin | *circ.* 1200 | | | | | | | |
| | Layamon | *circ.* 1200 | | | | | Frederic II., Pier della Vigna, Jacopo da Lentino, Ruggerone da Palermo — Sicilian Poets of the Court of Frederic II. | 1210 | — |
| | | | | | | | Guido delle Colonne | — | — |
| Edward I. | Author of *Hule and Nightingale* | *circ.* 1270 | | Jehan de Meung | 1260 | 1320 | Brunetto Latini | — | 1294 |
| | Robert of Gloucester | *circ.* 1290 | | | | | Francesco di Barberino | 1264 | 1348 |
| | William de Wadington | — | | Guillaume de Machault | ?1295 | 1377 | Guido Guinizelli | — | 1276 |
| | Author of *Cursor Mundi* | *circ.* 1300 | | | | | Guido Cavalcanti | — | 1300 |
| Edward II. | Robert Mannyng | 1260 | 1340 | | | | | | |
| | Richard of Hampole | — | 1349 | | | | Dante Alighieri | 1265 | 1321 |
| Edward III. | Laurence Minot | *circ.* 1320 | | | | | Cino da Pistoia | 1270 | 1337 |
| | William Langland | ?1330 | ?1400 | | | | Francesco Petrarca | 1304 | 1374 |
| | | | | | | | Fazio degli Uberti | ?1310 | ?1368 |
| | | | | | | | Giovanni Boccaccio | 1313 | 1375 |
| | | | | | | | Antonio Beccari | 1315 | 1370 |
| Richard II. | John Gower | ?1330 | 1408 | | | | Franco Sacchetti | 1330 | 1398 |
| | Geoffrey Chaucer | ?1335 | 1400 | Froissart | 1337 | 1410 | | | |
| | | | | Eustace Deschamps | ?1340 | ?1420 | | | |
| Henry IV. | Thomas Occleve | 1368 | 1448 | Christine de Pisan | 1363 | 1420 | | | |
| | John Lydgate | 1370 | ?1447 | Alain Chartier | 1386 | 1449 | | | |
| Henry V. | James I. of Scotland | 1394 | 1437 | Charles d'Orleans | 1391 | 1465 | | | |
| | | | | Pierre Gringoire | — | 1480 | | | |
| | | | | | | | Feo Belcari | 1410 | 1484 |
| Henry VI. | Thomas Henryson | 1425 | ?1500 | François Villon | 1431 | ?1490 | Luigi Pulci | 1431 | — |
| | | | | | | | Panfilo Sassi | 1447 | 1527 |
| | | | | | | | Lorenzo de' Medici | 1448 | 1492 |
| | | | | | | | Angiolo Poliziano | 1454 | 1494 |
| | | | | | | | Antonio Tebaldeo | ?1456 | 1537 |
| Henry VII. | William Dunbar | ?1460 | ?1530 | Pierre Blanchet | 1459 | 1519 | Jacopo Sannazaro | 1458 | 1530 |
| | Stephen Hawes | *circ.* 1500 | | | | | Pandolfo Collenuccio | — | 1504 |
| | John Skelton | ?1460 | 1529 | | | | Antonio Cornazzani | — | — |
| | Gavin Douglas | 1474 | 1522 | | | | Galeotto del Carretto | — | 1531 |
| | Alexander Barclay | 1476 | 1552 | | | | | | |

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JOHANNI WORDSWORTH, S.T.P.,

EPISCOPO SARISBURIENSI,

ET

ARTURO OCTAVIO PRICKARD, A.M.,

COLLEGII NOVI IN OXONIA SOCIO,

ÆQUALIBUS, CONDISCIPULIS, AMICIS,

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# PREFACE

It is more than one hundred and fifty years since a great English poet conceived the design of writing the history of English Poetry. The following scheme, preserved by Ruffhead,[1] and doubtless communicated to him by Warburton, represents the outlines of the plan on which Pope would have proceeded, though it seems never to have advanced beyond the paper on which it was scribbled :—

ÆRA I

1. School of Provence.
   - Chaucer's *Visions*, *Romaunt of the Rose*, *Pierce Plowman*, Tales from Boccace.
   - Gower.
2. School of Chaucer.
   - Lydgate.
   - T. Occleve.
   - Walt. de Mapes.
   - Skelton.
3. School of Petrarch.
   - E. of Surrey.
   - Sir Thomas Wyatt.
   - Sir Philip Sidney.
   - G. Gascoyn.
4. School of Dante.
   - Lord Buckhurst's *Induction*. *Gorboduc*.
   - Original of Good Tragedy. Seneca, his model.

ÆRA II

Spenser, Col. Clout, from the school of Ariosto and Petrarch, translated from Tasso.

5. School of Spenser.
   - W. Brown's *Pastorals*.
   - Ph. Fletcher's *Purple Island*, *Alabaster*, *Piscatory Ec.*
   - S. Daniel.
   - Sir Walter Raleigh.
   - Milton's *Juvenilia*. Heath, Habinton.

[1] *Life of Pope*, p. 425

Translations from Italian.
- Golding.
- Edm. Fairfax.
- Harrington.

6. School of Donne.
- Cowley, Davenant.
- Michael Drayton.
- Sir Thomas Overbury.
- Randolph.
- Sir John Davis.
- Sir John Beaumont.
- Cartwright.
- Cleveland.
- Crashaw.
- Bishop Corbet.
- Lord Falkland.

- Carew, T. Carey — In matter
- G. Sandys in his *Par. of Job*, Fairfax — In versification

→ Models to Waller.

- Sir John Mennis, Thos. Bagnal → Originals to Hudibras.

Pope's scheme came after his death into the hands of Gray, who was so much struck with it that he contemplated writing, in conjunction with Mason, a History of English Poetry on more or less similar lines. "Their design," says Mant in his *Life of Warton*, p. cxxvi., "was to introduce specimens of the Provençal poetry, and of the Scaldic, British, and Saxon, as preliminary to what first deserved to be called English poetry, about the time of Chaucer, from whence their history properly so called was to commence. Gray, however, was deterred by the magnitude of the undertaking, and being informed that Warton was employed on a similar design, more readily relinquished his own." The letter which he wrote to Warton on the occasion is as follows :—

PEMBROKE HALL, 15*th April* 1770.

Sir—Our friend Dr. Hurd having long ago desired me in your name to communicate any fragments or sketches of a design I once had to give a History of English Poetry, you may well think me rude

or negligent, when you see me hesitating for so many months before I comply with your request, and yet, believe me, few of your friends have been better pleased than I to find this subject (surely neither uninteresting nor unuseful) had fallen into hands so likely to do it justice: few have felt a higher esteem for your talents, your taste and industry; in truth, the only cause of my delay has been a sort of diffidence, that would not let me send you anything so short, so slight, and so imperfect, as the few materials I had begun to collect or the observations I had made on them. A sketch of the divisions and arrangement of the subject, however, I venture to transcribe, and would wish to know whether it corresponds in anything with your own plan, for I am told your first volume is already in the press.

*Introduction.*—On the poetry of the Gaelic (or Celtic) nations as far back as it can be traced.

On that of the Goths: its introduction into these islands by the Saxons and Danes, and its duration. On the origin of rhyme among the Franks, the Saxons, and the Provençaux; some account of the Latin rhyming poetry from its early origin down to the 15th century.

On the school of Provence, which rose about the year 1100, and was soon followed by the French and Italians: their heroic poetry or romances in verse, allegories, fabliaux, syrvientes, comedies, farces, canzoni, sonnets, balades, madrigals, sistines, etc. Of their imitators the French, and of the first Italian school (commonly called the Sicilian) about the year 1200, brought to perfection by Dante, Petrarch, Boccace, and others.

State of poetry in England from the Conquest (1066), or rather from Henry II.'s time (1154), to the reign of Edward III. (1327).

P. 2. On Chaucer, who first introduced the manner of the Provençaux, improved by the Italians, into our country; his characters and merits at large; the different kinds in which he excelled. Gower, Occleve, Lydgate, Hawes, G. Douglas, Lindsay, Bellenden, Dunbar, etc.

P. 3. Second Italian school (of Ariosto, Tasso, etc.), an improvement on the first, occasioned by the revival of letters in the end of the 15th century. The lyric poetry of this and the former age introduced from Italy by Lord Surrey, Sir T. Wyatt, Bryan, Lord Vaux, etc., in the beginning of the 16th century.

*Spenser*, his character, subject of his poem, allegoric and romantic, of Provençal invention; but his manner of creating it borrowed from the second Italian school. Drayton, Fairfax, Phin. Fletcher, Golding, Phaer, etc. This school ends in Milton.

A third Italian school full of conceit, begun in Queen Elizabeth's time, continued under James and Charles I. by Donne, Crashaw, Cleveland, and ends perhaps in Sprat.

P. 4. School of France introduced after the Restoration. Waller, Dryden, Addison, Prior, and Pope, which has continued down to our own times.

You will observe that my idea was in some measure taken from a scribbled paper of Pope, of which (I believe) you have a copy. You will also see that I have excluded dramatic poetry entirely, which if you have taken in, it will at least double the bulk and labour of your book.

To this letter Warton replied :—

WINCHESTER, 20*th April* 1770.

Sir—I am infinitely obliged to you for the favour of your letter. Your plan for the *History of English Poetry* is admirably constructed and much improved from an idea of Pope, which Mr. Mason obligingly sent me from our friend Dr. Hurd. I regret that a writer of your consummate taste should not have executed it.

Although I have not followed the plan, yet it is of great service to me, and throws much light on many of my periods by giving connected views and details. I begin with such an introduction or general dissertation as you had intended, viz. on the Northern Poetry, with its introduction into England by the Danes and Saxons, and its duration. I then begin my history at the Conquest, which I write chronologically in sections, and continue as matter successively offers itself, in a series of regular annals, down to and beyond the Restoration. I think with you that dramatic poetry is detached from the idea of my work, that it requires a separate consideration, and will swell the size of my book beyond all bounds. One of my sections, a very large one, is entirely on Chaucer, and will almost make my first volume, for I design two volumes in quarto. This first volume will soon be in the press. I should have said before that though I proceed chronologically, yet I often stand still to give some general view, as perhaps of a particular species of poetry, etc., and even anticipate sometimes for this purpose. These views often form one section, yet are interwoven with the tenor of the work, without interrupting my historical series. In this respect some of my sections have the effect of your parts or divisions.

I cannot take my leave without declaring that my strongest incitement to prosecute the *History of English Poetry* is the pleasing

hope of being approved by you, whose true genius I so justly venerate, and whose genuine poetry has ever given me such sincere pleasure.

Warton went some way in the execution of his design. His first volume was published in 1774; the second in 1778, by which time he must have seen clearly how impossible it would be for him to confine his history within the limits he had first intended. A third volume was produced in 1781, but afterwards his energy seems to have decayed, for on his death in 1790, his biographer says that "only a few of the sheets of vol. iv. were printed, and no part left in a state for printing." Joseph Warton talked of taking up his brother's task, but did nothing. In 1824 the *History of English Poetry* was republished under the editorship of Richard Price, who added an excellent Preface of his own on the "Origin of Romantic Fiction," and embodied in the work the notes of Ritson, Park, and other antiquaries. This edition was reprinted in 1840 with a few fresh notes by Thomas Wright and others. In 1871 it was again reprinted, with W. Carew Hazlitt as editor, two new dissertations being added to those which Warton had prefixed to his history,—one on the "Seven Sages," and the other on the "Lays of Marie of France"; so that Warton's work may be looked upon as a kind of classic fragment, the incompleteness of which has been emphasised by the glosses and alterations of three generations of commentators.

A monument of this kind furnishes an eloquent warning of the difficulties which await the historian of English Poetry. It was open to Warton to construct his history either on literary and technical, or on antiquarian, principles. Gray, it is plain, would have proceeded on the former lines, and every man must share Warton's regret that he made no attempt to bring his conception into being. His genius, his admirable taste, his correct

scholarship, his knowledge of Italian literature, would have made his interpretation of our older poetry of inestimable value, and though the proposed arrangement of his materials was in some respects arbitrary, experience would have shown him how to amend what was faulty in his design.

Had Warton chosen to follow the course contemplated by Pope and Gray, few men would have been better qualified to bring the undertaking to a successful issue. His reading was wide, his scholarship sound, his taste fine and discriminating; and though he had no pretensions to be called a great poet, his verse is at least marked by genuine poetic sensibility. Unfortunately he set about his work in the spirit of an antiquary, and in the patience, the industry, and the accuracy, required for this branch of knowledge, he was inferior to men who could not compare with him in capacity as a literary critic. His correspondence with Gray, and his method as shown in his *History*, equally declare that he had not formed any idea of the technical unity of his subject. He was aware that it was necessary for him to preserve at least some appearance of order in the arrangement of his materials, for he tells Gray that he "sometimes stands still to give a general view." But though he saw that the Origin of Romantic Fiction and the Introduction of Learning into England were both intimately associated with the History of Poetry, he did not treat them as if they were of its essence, but discussed them separately, incidentally, in a merely archæological temper, and with so little perception of their necessary relation to his subject, that he gave equal prominence to a "Dissertation" on the *Gesta Romanorum*. Moreover, by treating the history of poetry as if it meant a mere series of annals, he fell into the way of simply hunting up old metrical remains, without attempting to classify them by their poetic spirit and character.

If Gray, in the eighteenth century, could say with

justice that the study of the History of English Poetry was "neither unuseful nor uninteresting," his words have a yet wider meaning in our own time. Year by year the English language spreads itself farther over the earth's surface. Wherever it is spoken begins the great struggle for material prosperity which always accompanies the march of the Anglo-Saxon race. Free institutions spring up, and the very heat and fervour of democratic competition, the desire of writers to say some new thing or invent some new style, the ceaseless immigration of foreign sentiments, words, and idioms, all contribute to eat away the old standards of literary English. Unless, therefore, we keep before our eyes the true genius of the nation, as illustrated by writers who have embodied their thoughts in the most beautiful and enduring form, there is a grave danger that the language of England will yield to forces of the same kind as those which dissolved the structure of classical Latin. On the other hand, if, in the schools and universities which are multiplying through the British Empire, the study of our best classical authors be placed on a popular basis, it may become an instrument of the greatest value for the spread of knowledge and refinement.

While a writer of to-day who aims at filling this sensible void in our literature, may well accuse himself of presumption in approaching a task which men of genius have either shrunk from or failed to accomplish, he may at the same time derive encouragement from the thought that he enters on it with certain external advantages which were denied to his predecessors. Philology, Comparative Mythology, Archæology, have all thrown fresh light on the course of English Poetry. The labour of collecting materials has been infinitely lightened. Where Warton had to grope after specimens of old English poetry among MSS. or folios in black-letter, hidden away in remote nooks and corners, the enterprise of the Percy Society, the

Chaucer Society, the Early English Text Society, has enabled the critic to form a generalised view of the character of our primitive literature. It is as easy as it is illiberal to sneer at the scholar who reproduces, with all the care bestowed upon a play of Æschylus, the text of *William of Palerne* or *Guy of Warwick*. But the thanks of all lovers of learning are due to the patient toil of those who, leaving the more flowery paths of literature, are content to illustrate the infant efforts of the English Muse for the sake of any one who may feel an interest in them. Nevertheless, while the multiplication of materials makes it easier for the historian to generalise his conception, the task of selection and arrangement becomes, in one sense, more difficult. I have been bold enough to abandon the plan of Warton, and to revert, with considerable modifications, to the plan of Gray. But as men's ideas of what is meant by the History of Poetry have been greatly confused by the manner in which the subject has been treated, I must ask the reader to let me explain what are my reasons for building on altogether new foundations, and what the principles are on which this history is constructed.

1. The experience of Warton points clearly to the conclusion that the history of English Poetry cannot be treated in a satisfactory manner unless the design of the historian possesses unity. Gray's design satisfied this condition up to a certain point, but it was open to the objection, that though he accurately noted the course of our poetry, and gave a just analysis of the general causes that produced it, the classification he adopted did not always correspond with the facts. The "schools" of which he speaks existed only in a metaphor borrowed from the art of painting, which suggests that the poets grouped under them were separated from each other by external differences more profound than was actually the case, and which, moreover, seems to exclude

from the development of the art the operation of all but technical influences. I have endeavoured to extend his conception. In this history I have looked for the unity of the subject precisely where the political historian looks for it, namely, in the life of the nation as a whole: my aim has been to treat poetry as an expression of the imagination, not simply of the individual poet, but of the English people; to use the facts of political and social history as keys to the poet's meaning, and to make poetry clothe with life and character the dry record of external facts.

2. If the course of our poetry is to be treated historically, it must exhibit the principle of its growth and movement. Movement in political history is measured by the achievements of arms and commerce; in constitutional history by changes in laws and institutions, by the spectacle of

> Freedom slowly broadening down
> From precedent to precedent;

in poetry, and the other arts of expression, it is manifested by the simultaneous appearance in the nation of new modes of thought, fresh types of composition, improved methods of harmony. Mind works upon mind; the small beginnings of one generation are carried forward, if only a little way, in the next. Hence we cannot afford to despise the rude art of our forefathers; and it is much to be regretted that Warton, by simply collecting archaic materials without attempting to group and classify them, created a kind of distaste for the historic study of our early literature. See, for example, the effect his method has produced on a scholar like M. Taine.

"Must we," asks M. Taine, speaking of Chaucer's successors, "quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton; dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers,

most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter, even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic poems, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on heraldry, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dreams over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing in text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopædia of their times."[1]

Having thus dismissed the Middle Ages *en bloc*, M. Taine proceeds to consider the typical mediæval poet:—

"Listen to the most illustrious, the grave Gower—'morall Gower,' as he was called. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain, or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half dream their sweet smiles and their beautiful eyes. The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orleans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fondling delicacy almost a little affected. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin, transparent streamlets over the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble pretty, but so low that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, *Confessio Amantis*, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the *Roman de la Rose*, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, covered by a crude erudition. You will find there an exposition of hermetic science, lectures on the philosophy of Aristotle, a treatise on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in

[1] Taine's *History of English Literature* (translated by H. Van Laun), 1886. p. 219.

the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. . . . Hawes copies the *House of Fame* by Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem after the *Roman de la Rose*. . . . Barclay translates the *Mirror of Good Manners* and the *Ship of Fools*. Continually we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of greater originality it is in Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which in the hands of artists and poets were having their run throughout Europe."[1]

All this is very agreeable; some of it is very true. Yet it is questionable whether so much wit is quite appropriate in a humanist, whose motto ought to be *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*. "It remains for all of us to go where Numa and Ancus have arrived"; and it may be that the twenty-fifth century will find as little of interest in the nineteenth as M. Taine finds in the fourteenth century. But if the reader is to be taught to regard the poor English poets of the fourteenth century with such vast disdain, it would at least be well that the critic should allow him to descend in his balloon to an elevation at which objects can be separately discerned, and some slight regard be had to dates and characteristics. Gower is dull. No doubt; nevertheless, as he must have composed his ballads about the middle of the fourteenth century, there is some difficulty in supposing him to have been working in the "ingenious but exhausted vein" of Charles of Orleans, who began to write after the battle of Agincourt. Nor because Gower borrowed from Jean de Meung, for the machinery of his *Confessio Amantis*, the single idea of confession, need we at once leap to the conclusion that he was in other respects an imitator of that savage satirist; or indeed that the latter, in the

[1] Taine's *History of English Literature*, pp. 219-224.

*Roman de la Rose*, was animated by any such commonplace motive as "to explain and classify the impediments of love." It is certainly a trifling matter to be ignorant that there is no essential resemblance between the *Temple of Glass* and the *House of Fame*, and that, so far as any trace of "copying" is visible, the imitating author of the former poem was not Hawes, but Lydgate; but facts are perhaps held in too great contempt when "originality" is specially attributed to Lydgate, the most voluminous and plodding translator of the Middle Ages. One of Lydgate's translations (preserved at the end of a rare black-letter folio)[1] is entitled "The Dance of Machabree," and deals with the subject of the *Dance of Death;* but as this funereal composition is entirely guiltless of "buffoonery or gaiety," "sad or bitter," it may be conjectured that M. Taine's ideas of its character were derived from an imperfect recollection of what he "found in Warton" about the *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* by William Dunbar.

Morose, indeed, would an Englishman be, if he complained of the lively critics of France, who study the masterpieces of our literature with so much acuteness, and often with so much appreciation, because they turn with distaste from the lisping numbers of our earlier poets.[2] I have referred to M. Taine's critical method for the purpose partly of illustrating the disadvantages arising from Warton's chronological treatment of his subject, partly of proving to the English reader that we ourselves cannot afford to skim with the same lightness as M. Taine over two centuries of our national verse. For it is very certain that the poets of the late English Renaissance, whom M. Taine admires, by no means shared his opinion of Gower. In *Pericles*

[1] The only place where I have ever seen this poem is in Tottel's edition of the *Falls of Princes* (1554), a copy of which is in the British Museum.

[2] Yet M. Jusserand, writing with all the qualities of his nation, has succeeded in clothing the subject with amenity and interest in his *Histoire Littéraire du Peuple Anglais* (1894).

*Prince of Tyre*, parts of which were perhaps written by Shakespeare, Gower is introduced before each Act in the character of chorus, and at the opening of the play he is made to address the audience in doggerel verse as follows :—

> To sing a song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come ;
> Assuming men's infirmities,
> To glad your ear, and please your eyes.
> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales ;
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives ;
> The purchase is to make men glorious ;
> *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.*
> If you, born in these latter times,
> When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,
> And that to hear an old man sing
> May to your wishes pleasure bring,
> I life would wish, and that I might
> Waste it for you, like taper-light.

In a word, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists regarded themselves as the lineal descendants of the poets of the fourteenth century : they made use of their materials ; they inherited something of their spirit ; they even reproduced features of their style. If we are to understand the motives of the finished poetical architecture of the writers of the English Renaissance we must examine the foundations on which they built.

And this fact has a strong bearing on a method of critical interpretation exactly opposite to the depreciating spirit exhibited by M. Taine, and likely to have greater influence with the readers of our own time. Within the last twenty years a school of English humanists has arisen, which seeks to explain the character of all masterpieces of literature and art by personal sympathy and intuition, or by what may be justly called the method of

"appreciation." The word is one which cannot fail to recall to many of us how much has been lost to English literature by the recent deaths of two men of great distinction, Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. By their writings they exercised a wide influence on the most cultivated part of English society; their memory is endeared to the writer of these words by many cherished associations. One of them possessed a subtle and penetrating imagination, which he used to re-embody the ideas he derived from the study of works of art and literature in historic fiction, and in forms of language peculiarly his own; the other, with a nature most keenly alive to every kind of artistic beauty, communicated his impressions to the reader in words which reflected his own enthusiasm. Both were nearly of an age; both passed away almost suddenly in the maturity of their powers; both have left behind them works on which, as on the songs of Heraclitus, "Death, the ravager of all things, will not lay his hands."

Very characteristic are the words in which Pater and Symonds define the Renaissance, the period to which each of them had chiefly directed his study.

"For us," says the former, "the Renaissance is the name of a many-sided, but yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt, urging those who experience this desire to search out first one and then another means of intellectual or imaginative enjoyment, and directing them not merely to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of this enjoyment, but to divine new sources of it, new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new sources of art. *Of this feeling there was a great outbreak in the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the following century.*"—*The Renaissance*, by Walter Pater, p. 3 (1877).

"In the word Renaissance, or new birth," says Symonds, "in the phenomenon of Europe arousing herself from the torpor of ten centuries, we detect a spiritual regeneration, a natural crisis, not to be explained by this or that characteristic of its evolution, but to be accepted as an instinctive effort of humanity for which at length the time was come, which had been anticipated by the throes of centuries, and in the onward progress of which we still participate. . . . In the period between 1450–1550, we find *a sudden intellectual illumination, a spontaneous outburst of intelligence.*"—*The Renaissance of Modern Europe*, pp. 4, 5. A lecture delivered before the Sunday Lecture Society, by J. Addington Symonds (1872).

Hence it will appear that Symonds and Pater, while differing from each other widely as to the general nature, and even as to the date, of the Renaissance, agree in regarding it as a sudden and isolated movement of the human mind, which cannot be explained by the ordinary methods of historic investigation. Now, whatever be the charm of works produced by men who were able to imprint on their creation or criticism the stamp of originality, I cannot but think that such a method of interpretation, if generally adopted, must lead to a very erroneous conception of our own relations both to the Middle Ages and to the Renaissance. For there seems to be an obvious inconsistency in regarding the Renaissance as a sudden, mysterious, inexplicable movement, and in insisting at the same time that the meaning of this movement can be divined by the sympathetic intuition of modern criticism. Or, to put the case in the concrete, when a critic, with his thoughts full of the ideas, sentiments, associations, and prejudices of his age, seeks to interpret the mysterious phenomena of the remote past by mere personal sympathy, it must surely frequently happen that what he takes for a positive appreciation of historic truth

is, in reality, nothing more than an analysis of the impressions he observes in his own mind.

In this history I ask the reader to follow a longer, I think a more certain, but perhaps a less attractive road. M. Taine has said with justice that there is a certain resemblance between the work of the Middle Ages and the work of the decadence of the Roman Empire. This similarity is no more than natural, since the one period was the intellectual parent of the other; and in the same way the poetical work of the sixteenth century in England retains some of the features of the fourteenth, because the Renaissance is in touch with the Middle Ages. The business of historical criticism is to trace the stream of thought that connects age with age, and the almost imperceptible gradations which mark the advance of language and metrical harmony. By this means the transition of imagination from mediæval to modern times will appear much less abrupt and mysterious than we have been accustomed to consider it. Nor is the history of the early stages of our poetry wanting in an interest of its own. Gower, Lydgate, Occleve, and others, may be in themselves the dull folk that M. Taine finds them, but they rise into a position of some dignity when they are regarded as the pioneers of our poetry; and the reader who will have the patience to master the general character of their work will be rewarded for his labour by the fuller appreciation he will thereby bring to the study of later and greater writers.

It will be seen from the correspondence before cited that Gray would have excluded dramatic poetry from the purview of his history, and Warton expressed the same intention, though his history shows that he did not strictly abide by it. The nature of their designs made such a limitation in the scope of their work perfectly reasonable. I think, however, that, in a history which attempts to trace

the growth of imaginative life in the English nation through its poetry, it would be hardly possible to treat the subject with completeness without reference to the development of the drama. But as the history of the English theatre has been separately written by skilful hands, I shall treat of it only in a condensed form, and in so far as it illustrates the general design of this work.

3. A modern History of English Poetry must deal not only with the progress of poetical invention, but with the more technical question of the development of metrical harmony. And here I feel that a kind of apology is due to two classes of readers. First, to the philologist. I have made no special study of the science of Philology, and whatever knowledge I possess is derived from those who speak on the subject with recognised authority. The period of poetry treated in this volume has become almost the property of the philologists, and in availing myself of their labours for my own critical purposes, it may well be that I have been guilty of many errors, not, I would fain hope, of principle, but of detail. I shall be sincerely grateful to any one who will point out to me the existence of these mistakes, that I may hereafter have an opportunity of correcting them. But I have also to ask for the indulgence of the general reader, whose interest in the earlier stages of our poetry I am particularly anxious to arouse. I am well aware that men shrink with even more repugnance from archaisms of language than from obsolete modes of thought; and I can only remind the reader that a certain knowledge of the older forms of our tongue is absolutely necessary for a full appreciation of the style of our greatest writers. The amount of labour required for the purpose is, however, much less than is often supposed. In order to illustrate the progress of our poetry I have made one or two selections from Anglo-Saxon, and many from old

English, compositions. Wherever I have done this I have reproduced the original text without, as a rule, attempting to modernise it; but I have given in the footnotes either a translation of each passage, or such a vocabulary as will enable the reader, without much difficulty, to gather the drift of the meaning.

These words of explanation and apology must be concluded with a word of grateful acknowledgment. To one who, like myself, can devote only a limited portion of time to research, it is all-important to have quick access to the sources of reference. My warmest thanks are therefore due to the authorities of the British Museum, who have in this respect made a task now continued for some years easy and agreeable to me. From every one of the officers and staff in the reading-room of that unrivalled institution I have received unfailing marks of courtesy and attention. I scarcely know how to acknowledge in adequate words my debt to Mr. G. K. Fortescue, superintendent of the reading-room, for the unwearied kindness he has shown in providing me with all the materials I have required, and in directing me to possible channels of information. I desire also to express my special gratitude to Mr. R. Wilson and to Mr. G. W. Barwick for the patience with which they have ministered to my frequent wants; and to Mr. H. Jenner, for the readiness with which he has more than once placed at my disposal his wide knowledge of the mediæval romances.

W. J. C.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY—THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

I HOPE to be able to complete in the following pages the History of the Art of English Poetry from the time of Chaucer to the time of Scott. By English Poetry I mean metrical compositions, written in our language from the period at which it becomes fairly intelligible to readers of the present day. By the Art of English Poetry I mean all characteristic writing of a metrical kind that can be classified under any of the recognised forms of composition,—epic, dramatic, lyrical, or didactic. And by the History of the Art of English Poetry I mean, not simply an appreciation of the motives by which each individual poet seems to have been consciously inspired, but also an inquiry into those general causes which have unconsciously directed imagination in this country into the various channels of metrical composition.

Before embarking on a long and laborious task, I feel it expedient to deal with a doubt that may be raised, whether the subject is one that really possesses the unity and consistency I have claimed for it. For it is no doubt the case that what is often meant by a History of English Poetry is merely an account of the lives of the English poets, and such an estimate of their works as may be formed by the judgment of the particular historian. The very essence of poetry is supposed to lie in the inspiration of the individual poet, the sources of which are beyond the reach of critical investigation.

Nor do I deny that there is some truth in this view of the matter. It may be freely admitted that, in estimating that indefinable quality called Genius, the force that makes a great poet, a great statesman, or a great general what he is, must necessarily defy analysis. Nevertheless, in all the arts every student soon learns, and every great artist has acknowledged, that those who would excel must take account of conditions which they did not create and can only partially control. "Milton," says Dryden, "was the poetical son of Spenser and Mr. Waller of Fairfax, for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original, and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the Godfrey of Bulloigne which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax."[1]

As far then as regards the mere technical side of the art, it is certain that the sources of poetical production can be accurately traced. But there is something more. The poet is, in a sense, the epitome of the imaginative life of his age and nation; and, indeed, it may be said that in what may be called his raw materials—his thought, imagination, and sentiment—his countrymen co-operate in his work; though the form in which these materials are presented, an all-important contribution, is the creation of the poet alone. Almost every great English poet has shown his consciousness of the organic national life in which he shares, by some kind of apostrophe to the genius of his country; as, for example, when in a famous speech Shakespeare makes John of Gaunt say—

> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
>
> . . . . .
>
> This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,

[1] Dryden, Preface to the *Fables*.

Dear for her reputation through the world
. . . . .
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself;

or when, in the somewhat factious vein of the Opposition under George II., Pope cries out—

The plague is on thee, Britain!

or when Cowper, in a semi-Methodist spirit, declares—

England! with all thy faults, I love thee still;

or, once more, when Campbell exclaims in the enthusiasm of victory—

Now joy, old England, raise,
For the tidings of thy might!

A great poem is, in fact, an image of national feeling; the inward life of our nation is reflected not less clearly in the course of our poetry, than its outward growth in the achievements of its laws, arms, and commerce.

But on this point it is necessary to be precise. It is not to be assumed that English poetry is, in the same manner as the poetry of Greece, the spontaneous product of the soil, the air, and the institutions of the country. This assumption is frequently made. English literature is taken to mean all literature that has been produced in England; and as most Englishmen are of Anglo-Saxon descent, and the majority of English words have a Teutonic origin, English poetry since Chaucer is sometimes regarded as the natural development of Anglo-Saxon poetry, or at any rate as the fruit mainly of Anglo-Saxon genius. Scholars of great eminence—English, French, and German—have acquiesced in this treatment of the subject, so that it is a common thing to find all writings in prose or verse, produced in this country from the days of Cædmon to the end of the fifteenth century, classed together under the title of "Early English Literature."[1] Now, however

[1] Professor Ten Brink and M. Jusserand have adopted this method. Mr. Stopford Brooke has carried it farther than any one. In his valuable

convenient such an arrangement may be for the general historian of literature, it is not at the disposal of one who seeks to trace methodically the development of the art of English poetry. Between the poetry produced in England before the Norman Conquest and the poetry of Chaucer there is absolutely no link of connection. In the poems of the Anglo-Saxons the general reader finds an expression of the mind of a nation cut off from the long tradition of civilisation almost as completely as the Britons before they were brought under the Roman Empire ;[1] a language still in its inflected stage, and hardly more intelligible to him than Russian or Sanskrit ; and a metrical system, prevailing, doubtless, in the forests of Germany long before the days of Arminius, but which, even in Chaucer's time, had almost fallen into disuse. On the other hand, in the *Canterbury Tales*, he is in the presence of ideas and sentiments common to that western Christendom which, since the end of the eleventh century, had shown itself capable of concerted action ; he reads, with comparatively little difficulty, a language so completely transformed from its ancient state, that its direct descent from the Anglo-Saxon can be barely recognised ; and he may follow from their infant springs the course of new metres which, derived from France, are destined to swell into noble streams of harmonious English in the hands of Shakespeare and Milton, Dryden and Pope, Byron and Wordsworth.

The history of English poetry has, in fact, a far closer analogy with the development of Latin poetry, modified and directed as this was by standards introduced from without, than with the indigenous self-

*History of Early English Literature*, which is really a History of Anglo-Saxon Literature, he says : "The interest is even greater when we consider this (Anglo-Saxon) poetry in connection with the whole of English song. It will be seen that a great number of the main branches of the tree of English poetry had already opened out at this time from the stem, and that the ideal and sentimental elements of the earliest poetry have continued with natural changes to the present day. Here then, in the two hundred years between 670 and 870, the roots of English poetry, the roots of that vast overshadowing tree, were set ; and here its first branches clothed themselves with leaves."—Preface, vi. vii.

[1] Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.—Virg. *Bucol.* Ecl. i. 67.

evolved poetry of the Greeks, and the business of the historian is rather to analyse the complex causes of the growth of our poetry, than to record the family descent of the art through a long succession of poets from Anglo-Saxon times. From Chaucer downwards we may distinctly observe in English poetry the confluence of three great streams of thought, which blend in a single channel without any of them ever quite losing its separate life and identity. Of these the first, and perhaps the most powerful, is the genius of Race, the stream of Anglo-Saxon language, character, and custom, modified by the influence of Scandinavian imagination, as well as by all the impulses and ideas derived from the Latin nations through the Norman Conquest. The second is the tradition of Education systematised by the Latin Church, many traces of which still survive in the courses of our universities and public schools. The third is the tradition of Græco-Roman Culture, carried through the barbarous ages in many slender ducts and channels, which, mingling the spirit of the ancient world with the infant civilisation of Europe, prepared the way for the great revival of arts and letters commonly known as the Renaissance.

Through the whole history of our poetry the relative influence of each of these great primal forces fluctuates enormously. In the period between Chaucer and Surrey we see the mediæval current running with preponderating power, blended only with a faint national colour derived from Chaucer's dramatic genius, and with an equally slight tinge of classicalism, reflected from his study of Ovid, Virgil, and Statius. The increasing strength of the Renaissance is indicated, through the sixteenth century, by a profusion of superficial classical imagery, which mixes itself, in naïve incongruity, with the allegorical forms peculiar to the learning of the Middle Ages. The spirit of this period is illustrated and summed up in the poetry of Spenser. Towards the close of Elizabeth's reign national feeling begins to exercise a predominating influence on poetical form, particularly in the theatre, and from that time to the

Revolution of 1688, the dwindling force of Mediævalism is discerned in the character of the poetry commonly called Metaphysical, and in the extravagance of the Romantic drama. After the Revolution the national principle and the classical principle combine their forces, while the genius of the Middle Ages seems to be so near extinction, that the closest observation is required to detect traces of its influence. Suddenly, about the latter half of the eighteenth century, the mediæval impulse is seen to revive; the classical tide begins to ebb; while the collective volume of national thought shows a tendency to distribute itself into a number of individual channels, a movement continued down to our own time, with a persistency of which all can perceive the extent, though none can calculate the issue.

Now, in the midst of all this variety there is plainly unity; and if we are to interpret rightly the meaning of these fluctuations of taste, and of their effect on the minds of individual poets, we must endeavour to trace them to their source. And here begins the difficulty of the historian. In one sense the poetry of Chaucer offers a singularly favourable starting point for an inquiry of this kind, since in him we see, for the first time, all the opposing principles just mentioned, united in such a way that the separate action of each can be clearly distinguished. Chaucer is justly called the father of our poetry, as having been the first to impose on the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary those Norman forms of harmony, which his successors have ever since continued to employ. In his poetry, also, we get the first glimpse of an organised nation with an instrument capable of giving articulate expression to its thoughts and interests. At the same time we observe there the working of primeval forces, older than the life of the English nation, more complex than the life of the Teutonic tribe. German feudalism, Latin Christianity, Oriental tradition, are all blended in his mind. Vague memories of the vanished Roman Empire linger in his tales, a curious medley of monastic history and barbarous legend. His poetical theology is a mixture of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

and the *Acta Sanctorum;* a reverence for the "authority" of the Fathers of the Church combines in his imagination with the spirit of destructive satire initiated by the *Romance of the Rose.*

But immediately we attempt to explain the strangely composite character of Chaucer's genius, by tracing its antecedents, we encounter a perplexing problem. The great principles of inspiration, blended in him, are now seen to diverge, and to flow as distinct rivers from opposite directions. By which line shall we proceed? If we follow the stream of Race and Language, we move towards the primitive homes of the Anglo-Saxons; if we follow the stream of Thought and Education, we travel into the region of mixed culture prevailing among the nations of joint Latin and Teutonic descent. Both tributaries of thought have the magnitude and interest of rivers; yet of the two arms one must be regarded as of superior importance in the history of English poetry; and the doubt, as to the direction in which lies the main fountain of the art, wraps the subject in mystery and obscurity like that which once shrouded the sources of the Nile.

I have already said that an attempt to derive the originals of Chaucer from the cradles of the Anglo-Saxon race must necessarily end in disappointment. If, on the other hand, we seek to trace his imagination through its immediate literary sources,—if, that is to say, we connect it with the poetry of races of partial Latin descent,—we proceed on a course which at least enables us to link cause with effect. Leaving the strictly limited sphere of Anglo-Saxon interests, we come into touch with a great community of nations which, though they are separated from each other by differences of language and race, are still united by a common system of faith, education, and military institution, and can to a certain extent co-operate, like the states of ancient Greece, against a common foe. We see that the contemporary writers of this vast European society are dealing, under various conditions, with similar problems of thought. We see, moreover, that the problems with which they deal take their rise far off in a

more ancient system of civilisation, dimly discerned, but not joined to the life of Europe in the Middle Ages by any apparently continuous stream of literature. The secret course of the river must be traced through this interval before we can hope to arrive at the primal fountains of mediæval poetry.

That is the task I propose to myself at the opening of this history. In the next chapter I shall endeavour to show with some fulness the progressive stages in the formation of the mediæval stream of thought, which feeds the literatures of England, France, and Italy; and to connect it with the great system of Græco-Roman culture, which seems—but only seems—to disappear from the world after the death of Boethius. When we have followed this stream down to the period at which men began to make use of the modern European languages for the purposes of literature, we must explore the course of the national language in order to observe the changes produced by Saxon and Norman influences on the art of metrical expression, before it received the developments of Chaucer. Another chapter must be devoted to an examination of the meaning of the word "Renaissance," and of the early effects of the movement on the infant literature of Europe. We shall then be in a position to set in just perspective that evolution of poetical thought and language which I have described as characterising the art of succeeding poets.

The design of this work necessarily imposes certain limitations on the treatment of the subject. In the first place, as it is intended primarily for a history of poetical thought, I shall only deal with language in so far as its growth produces changes of rhythm or metre. In the second place, it is proposed to write of poetry as an art, rather than of the lives and work of individual poets. I shall, therefore, not attempt to furnish an exhaustive record of all surviving metrical compositions, but shall confine myself to selecting what is vital and characteristic, judging of every man's work as something contributed to the advancement of the art, or at least as illustrative of its

initial stages. The present volume will mainly furnish examples of the latter kind, for, with the exception of Chaucer, the Giotto of English poetry, almost all the early English poets resemble the Christian painters of the Byzantine era, whose genius failed to lift them above the stiff conventional forms imposed on them by tradition and education. Such art, usually devoid of beauty and originality, is yet exceedingly valuable as illustrative of motive ; and indeed the poems of Chaucer himself, like the paintings of Giotto, are often more interesting for what is attempted in them than for what is actually accomplished, something of the life of the whole composition depending on the artist's imperfect mastery over his instrument of expression. No man in a history like this would be so foolish as to deprive himself of the interest rising from biographical detail, but I shall restrict myself as far as possible to such matters of the kind as throw light on each poet's character and work, and are therefore entirely germane to the subject. On the other hand, there are certain subjects not directly connected with poetry, such as the contemporary forces acting on religion and politics, which, as they contribute to the general movement of art, will properly find a place in this history ; nor shall I shrink from diverging into the literature of other nations, when it seems useful to do so for the purpose of illustrating my argument.

A word must be added as to the method of criticism which will be hereafter adopted. I shall not attempt to judge the work of individual poets by any *a priori* standard, artistic or moral, but rather to form conclusions from experience and observation as to the causes of permanence in poetical life. This history will have to deal with poets whose creations, at the distance of five hundred, three hundred, two hundred years, are as fresh and vigorous as when they were first given to the world. Others will require attention who, after having been exalted by contemporary opinion as the equals of Homer and Virgil, have gradually sunk into neglect,—writers to whom the witty, if audacious, remark of

Rochester on Cowley may be justly applied, "Not being of God they could not stand." It is the business of historical criticism to discover the reasons for these fluctuations of taste; and the course of our inquiry will show plainly that the secret of poetical, as of every other kind of life, lies in the union of opposite principles. It will be seen that as, on the one hand, the classical English poets are those who, by happiness of nature or judgment, have learned to harmonise in themselves conflicting tendencies of thought and language, and to bring them into just relation with the life of their own times, so, on the other, the great but decayed reputations belong to writers who have formed their art by thrusting some single principle of thought or language into undue prominence. But in order to appreciate the truth of this remark, the student must be in a position to trace the development of English poetry from its original sources.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHARACTER AND SOURCES OF MEDIÆVAL POETRY

An English reader who has formed his imagination on the works of the great classical authors, ancient and modern, who has, for example, read Homer and Horace and Virgil, *Don Quixote*, and the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, but who, ignorant of the literature of the Middle Ages, tries without preparation to gain an idea of the life of the period from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, soon finds that he is moving in a somewhat bewildering world. In the Prologue to those Tales he is introduced to a company of nine-and-twenty pilgrims drawn from every station in life, and separated from each other by the nicest distinctions of dress, speech, and manners, yet all associated for the moment in discharge of a common religious duty, and conversing among themselves on terms of perfect equality. The whole scene is brought before him full of life and colour by the large humanity and dramatic power of the poet. From certain survivals of names and things he may even be able to form a general idea of the constitution of the society represented in the poem, but in detail almost everything seems unfamiliar to him. What, for instance, is he to understand by the description of such personages as the Knight and the Franklin, the Reve and the Manciple, the Monk and the Prioress, the Pardoner and the Summoner? And as to the other characters, a very short acquaintance with them suffices to show that, if he is to sympathise with their feelings, to enter into their jests and by-play, and to appreciate their ways of

thought about man and nature, he must submit to a preliminary course of historical study.

If, on the other hand, we suppose—for the matter is one which can be best explained by illustration—a Roman of the age of Trajan to revisit the world, and to seek enlightenment as to the course of affairs since his time by referring to the poems of Chaucer, the case would not be very different. Such a reader would indeed find in Chaucer the mention of many persons and things which from old association would be "familiar in his mouth as household words." But in the extraordinary disguises in which they now presented themselves he would hardly be able to recognise his former acquaintance. Theseus become a "Duke," Ovid a "clerk," Virgil a "magician"; Roman emperors negotiating with Mohammedan sultans; the story of the Trojan War told, not by Homer, but by one Dares Phrygius;—such would be a few of the minor puzzles taxing his ingenuity, so that his perplexity would perhaps be even greater than that of the latter-day Englishman who approached the subject from the opposite side.

If yet, again, we imagine the English and the Roman reader brought into each other's company, it is certain that on many subjects they would be able to exchange ideas with little difficulty. Both, for example, would judge the vulgar Nasidienus, so inimitably described in Horace's satire, by one standard of breeding; both would sympathise heartily with the poet as he relates his capture by the bore on the Via Sacra. Our countryman might show his visitor how easily Pope, in his *Imitations of Horace*, had transferred Roman ideas into the social atmosphere of George II.'s reign; and how similar was the character of city life, as described in Juvenal's Third Satire, to that represented in Johnson's *London*. The Roman would find that Shakespeare had borrowed the plot of a Latin comedy for the Elizabethan stage, and would be able to follow, not without sympathy, the action of the chief English tragedies. On the merits of the *Odyssey* the ancient and the modern would be perfectly agreed, and they would probably not differ widely in their estimate of the *Romance of the Rose*.

In this parable are presented the conditions of the problem summed up for us in the familiar phrases, "The Middle Ages" and "The Renaissance." What is the meaning of such curious facts? How is it that, in matters of taste and feeling, we can readily sympathise with the thoughts of men who lived two thousand years ago, and who are separated from ourselves by race, language, and religion? How is it, on the other hand, that we find so much difficulty in putting ourselves in imagination into the intellectual position of Englishmen in the fourteenth century of our own era? The fact that we can easily understand the thoughts of the great writers of antiquity, means that our heritage of western civilisation,—that community of sentiment on questions of morals, taste, arts, and science, which is shared to a great extent by all the nations of modern Europe,—is derived in unbroken descent from the small group of Greek cities scattered five-and-twenty centuries ago along the shores of the Ægean and Ionian Seas. The fact that the sentiment of Europe during the central part of this tradition is apparently out of touch with its sentiment at the Greek starting point on the one hand, and with modern sentiment on the other, means that the course of civilisation has been so profoundly modified by wars, conquests, internal revolutions, fluctuations of commerce, and, above all, changes of religion, that the thread of continuity can with difficulty be traced. Finally, the fact that we ourselves find more in common with the life of the Greeks and Romans than with the life of Europe in the Middle Ages, means that, in the city states of antiquity, as in our own times, civil standards of thought prevailed, while, in the mediæval period, the predominant cast of thought was feudal and ecclesiastical. In the times of the Greeks and Romans, that is to say, before the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, the religious and political elements of social life were inseparably blended in the general system of the State; in the Middle Ages there was a separation and conflict between the spiritual and temporal powers, with a predominating

influence on the side of the Church; since the fifteenth century there has been a tendency to a reconciliation or concordat between the opposing forces, the balance of power inclining to the side of the State. This great struggle contains the secret principle of the whole life and movement of European civilisation; and it is recorded, not more plainly in political history, than in the development of architecture, painting, sculpture, and, above all, of poetry. It is therefore necessary for a right understanding of the character of English poetry, at the point from which this history starts, to appreciate the nature of the vast change in the life of imagination effected during the decline of the Roman Empire and the gradual formation of the mediæval system in Europe. The subject is obscure and difficult, but I think it may be treated with something of completeness under the four following heads: I. The decline of the civic spirit under the Roman Empire, and the corresponding decay of classical taste. II. The transformation of the system of imperial education by the Latin Church. III. The rise of a new mythology among the nations embraced within the system of Latin Christianity. IV. The influence of feudal institutions, of the scholastic logic, and of Oriental culture.

I. When Constantine moved the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople, his act may have seemed, in the eyes of his contemporaries, nothing more than the choice of a new capital by an absolute monarch, influenced by considerations, to use the words of Gibbon, of "beauty, safety, and wealth."[1] But, in the eyes of posterity, the event signifies rather the approaching dissolution of a great type of civilisation, the very memory of which, in its ancient form, was destined to remain in a state of suspended animation for nearly ten centuries.

By his abandonment of Rome, Constantine seemed to proclaim that the last spark of the civic life of antiquity, the two-fold creation of Greek and Roman genius, was finally extinguished. The Greeks had been the first to develop the type; and all the priceless treasure of art and letters,

[1] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, vol. ii. p. 293 (Smith's edition).

the revelation of which so profoundly stirred the mind of Europe in the fifteenth century, was the product of that system of life in its highest perfection. The idea of the State lay at the root of every Greek conception of art and morals. For though, in the view of the philosopher, the virtue of the good citizen was not always necessarily identical with the virtue of the individual man,[1] and though, in the city of Athens, at all events, a large amount of life was possible to the individual apart from public interests, yet it is none the less true that the life of the individual in every Greek city was in reality moulded by the customary life, tradition, and character, in one untranslatable word, by the ἦθος, of the State. Out of this native soil grew that recognised, though not necessarily public, system of education (πολιτικὴ παιδεία), consisting of reading and writing, music and gymnastic, which Plato and Aristotle[2] themselves accepted as the basis of the constitution of the State. But this preliminary education was only the threshold to a subsequent system of political training, of which, in Athens at least, every citizen had an opportunity of availing himself by his right to participate in public affairs, so that, in the view of Pericles, politics themselves were an instrument of individual refinement. "The magistrates," said he in his great funeral oration, "who discharge public trusts fulfil their domestic duties also; the private citizen, while engaged in professional business, has competent knowledge in public affairs, for we stand alone in regarding the man who keeps aloof from these latter not as harmless, but as useless. Moreover, we always hear and pronounce on public matters when discussed by our leaders, or perhaps strike out for ourselves correct reasonings about them; far from accounting discussion an

[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, Book iii. c. 4.

[2] Aristotle, arguing for the necessity of a public system of education, says: "Again, as the end proposed to the State as a whole is one, it is clear that the education of all the citizens must be one and the same, and the superintendence of it a public affair, rather than in private hands as it now is, when each individual superintends his own children privately, and with such private instruction as he thinks good. The training in public business should be itself public."—*Politics*, v. 1 (Welldon's translation). Nevertheless he does not propose any *fundamental* change in the accepted curriculum.

impediment to action, we complain only if we are not told what is to be done before it becomes our duty to do it." [1]

The strenuous exertion of all the faculties of the individual in the service of the State, described in these eloquent words, reflects itself in the highest productions of Greek art and literature, and is the source of that "political" spirit which every one can detect, alike in the poems of Homer and the sculptures of the Parthenon, as the inspiring cause of the noblest efforts of imitation. It prevailed most strongly through the period between the battle of Marathon and the battle of Chæronea, and has left its monuments in such plays as the *Persæ* and *Eumenides* of Æschylus, the *Antigone* of Sophocles, the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, the History of Thucydides, and the orations of Demosthenes, its last embodiment being perhaps the famous oath of that orator on the souls of those who risked their lives at Marathon.[2]

But the work of the Greek in the history of civilisation began and ended with the autonomy of the individual city. Weakened as it was by factions within and rivalries without, no single Greek city was able long to maintain its supremacy, much less to impose its ideas upon the world. One by one they sank before the overwhelming Macedonian power, and, with the extinction of their liberties, the political motives for individual exertion expired. Henceforward the activity of the Greeks became solely intellectual. Knowledge and learning were now pursued for their own sake, and for the old system of political education (*πολιτικὴ παιδεία*) was gradually substituted the encyclopædic education (*ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*), including the seven arts or sciences,—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. But this cosmopolitan system proved itself nearly powerless to awake the fires of inventive genius. The civic spirit, the decline of which had already shown itself in the tragedies of Euripides, almost disappeared in the New Comedy of Menander; and, with the exception of the poetry of

[1] Thucydides, ii. 41 (Grote's paraphrase).

[2] Demosthenes, *De Corona*, p. 297, *ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐκ ἔστιν, κ.τ.λ.*

Theocritus and his fellow idyllists—the inspiration of which was no longer due to the city—late Greek literature failed to produce any characteristic form of art. The language fell into the hands of grammarians, sophists, and rhetoricians; whatever was invented by these men had a purely literary origin; and though their compositions have a certain interest of their own, they no longer reflect the feelings and energies of free political life.

It was reserved for an Italian city, inferior to many of the Greek states in intellectual power, to realise those ideas of empire which had been only dreams in the minds of men like Pericles and Epaminondas. Not nimble of wit, nor refined in taste, the Roman possessed a stubborn tenacity of purpose, an indomitable pride of race, a grandeur of political conception, and a genius for expanding his own institutions and understanding the ideas of others, which enabled him to bring the world within his imperial system. The greatness of Rome was as entirely civil in its origin as that of any Greek city, and, like the Greek cities, Rome, in the days of her freedom, and while she was still fighting for the mastery, preserved a system of political education, both in the hearth and the senate, which was suited to her character. The Roman character was formed mainly by the combination of two principles, the religion of the family and the discipline of the camp; and the education by which this type was maintained is well illustrated by a passage in Plutarch's life of Cato the Censor, who was, says the biographer, "himself his son's teacher in law, grammar, and in all the necessary exercises. For he taught him not only how to throw a dart, to fight hand to hand, and to ride, but to box, to endure heat and cold, and to swim in the roughest and most rapid parts of the river. He wrote histories for him, as he further acquaints us, with his own hand, in large characters; so that without leaving his father's house he might gain a knowledge of the illustrious actions of the ancient Romans and of the customs of his country."[1]

[1] Plutarch's *Life of Cato Major*, c. 20. Quoted in Fowler's *City State*, p. 272.

A more complete contrast to the purely academic education, for which, in the declining days of the Empire, such careful provision was made, it would be impossible to conceive. And what is of particular importance to observe is, that, even after the introduction of Greek culture, Cato's educational ideal was felt to be the foundation of Roman greatness by the orators and poets who adorned the golden age of Latin literature. "For my part, judges," says Cicero in one of his speeches, drawing the character of the good citizen, "if a man be endowed with such strength of soul and such natural virtue and self-restraint as to be proof against pleasure, and to devote the whole course of his life to labour of body and application of mind; not seeking delight in quiet, or indolence, or the fashionable pursuits of the time, in games or in banquets; thinking nothing in life worthy of ambition unless it be accompanied with honour and dignity; this man is, in my opinion, furnished and adorned with certain divine qualities. Of this class I imagine to have been the Camilli, the Fabricii, and those who, with the slenderest resources, accomplished such mighty deeds."[1]

In the same vein Virgil, that ardent lover of antiquity, as Quintilian calls him, rises to the noblest heights of poetry in praising Italy as the mother of the Decii, the Marii, and the great Camilli.[2] Disgusted with the exaggerated wealth and luxury of the city, with its flood of servile clients rushing to the morning levée, and the roar of legal and political declamation, he refreshes his soul with the images of ancient simplicity: "This was the life that the old Sabines once held in honour; thus surely strong Etruria throve, and Rome became fairest of created things."[3] Horace, trained in the schools of Athens, finds, nevertheless, his true philosopher in the rustic Ofellus, a genuine Roman of the old style, "wise without rules, through rough mother-wit."[4] The teaching which moves his heart is that conveyed to him in the "nursery songs sung by

[1] Cicero, *Pro Cælio*, cap. 17. The whole of this speech is well worth reading as illustrating the decay of the Roman *ἦθος*.

[2] Virg. *Georgic.* ii. 169. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 534. [4] Horace, *Sat.* ii. 2. 3.

the manly Curii and Camilli."[1] His heroes, the subjects of his lyrical verse, are the rude old farmer generals of the Republic. Their ideals are his: "an estate of no great extent, with a garden, a spring of fresh water, and perhaps a little wood."

*Pietas* and *gravitas:* these are the two qualities produced by the Roman political education which distinguish alike the character of the great men of the Republic and the style of the great authors of the Golden Age.[3] But this character was not destined to endure.

> Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes
> Intulit agresti Latio.

The very poets and orators who most nobly celebrated the ἦθος of their country had learned their cunning from Greek masters. Conscious of her own inferiority in art and philosophy, Rome accepted with deference the Alexandrian summary of Hellenic culture which she found established in the cities of the East, and carried the encyclopædic system of education as the companion of her arms and laws into the communities which she created after the Roman model in Spain, Gaul, and Britain. Beneath this cosmopolitan solvent the "piety" and "gravity" of the old national style were gradually decomposed alike in literature and politics. We see them on the eve of extinction in Juvenal's fierce denunciations of the growing trivialities of Roman life; the chatter of small poets reciting in the city, the declaiming school-boys, the jockey consul driving his chariot over the ashes of his ancestors, the starveling Greek with his smattering of encyclopædic knowledge. No moral satire could arrest the course of inevitable decline. As all real power became centralised in the Emperor, and the importance of Rome in the imperial system constantly diminished, the Roman citizen ceased to feel the stimulating influence of the ancient

[1] Hor. *Epist.* i. 1. 64. [2] Hor. *Sat.* ii. 6. 1-3.

[3] *Pietas* is a word sufficiently illustrated by the name of Virgil. As to the other, St. Jerome (*Epistola ad Rusticum*) reminds a correspondent how his mother had sent him from Gaul to Rome, "ut ubertatem Gallici nitoremque sermonis *gravitas Romana* condiret."

political education. He inverted the rule of Cicero, and no longer finding anything on the petty stage of municipal life "accompanied with honour and dignity," thought "nothing worthy of ambition."

But while the reverence for the national ἦθος thus waned, the Romans attached an ever-increasing value to mere intellectual life and Hellenic culture. The encyclopædic education came to be looked upon as something that every gentleman was bound to have received, and even so conservative a critic as Quintilian considers a knowledge of music and geometry as part of the necessary training of a good orator.[1] In the time of the cosmopolitan Hadrian, this fashion became so much of a craze, that Greek began to supersede Latin in the language of polite society. After this date the Roman classical spirit may be accounted dead in Latin literature. Rhetoric, once treated as an instrument for training the mind in public business, was now studied for its own sake; the strong Roman sense of Quintilian was exchanged, in a critic like Fronto, for quibbling refinement about words; poets of such real talent as Ausonius possessed, devoted themselves to the elaboration of epigrams and acrostics; and bishops with the natural good taste of Sidonius Apollinaris aimed at acquiring a reputation for style as polite letter-writers. Here and there a man of genius, Claudian or Rutilius, struck a note of the genuine Roman character; but these are after all little more than literary echoes, and, generally speaking, so far from the Hellenism of the Roman Empire having been suppressed, as some think, by the antagonism of Christianity, it is evident that, had there been no Popes and no barbarians, that form of culture must have perished from internal decay.

The loss of civic liberty, with all the code of manners and taste that depended upon it, was the loss of Rome herself. But there is another, and for the world in general a more important, side of the question. In the history of mankind Rome must be judged, not simply as a

[1] Quintilian, *Institut.* i. 10: "Nunc de ceteris artibus, quibus instituendos, priusquam rhetori tradantur, pueros existimo, strictim subjungam, ut efficiatur orbis ille doctrinæ, quem Græci ἐγκύκλιον παιδείαν vocant."

single state, but as the head of a great imperial system, embracing the entire material fabric of ancient civilisation, as the guardian of the independence of individual cities, as the propagator of all the Hellenic arts of life, in a word, as the protectress of whatever was understood by the famous phrase, *Pax Romana*. This was the light in which she appeared to her grateful provincial subjects even in the last day of her decline. It was natural that to Horace and Virgil, writing at the height of her greatness, she should have seemed "the first of cities,"[1] "the most beautiful of things."[2] But long afterwards, when the seat of empire was in Constantinople, the Gallic Ausonius gave the first place in his list of noble cities[3] to "Golden Rome, the home of all the gods." Claudian, an Egyptian, introduces her in one of his poems as herself a deity;[4] and her divine attributes are summed up in what is perhaps the most remarkable tribute ever paid to her power, as it is certainly the last flash of genuine inspiration in Latin poetry. Six years after Alaric had appeared before the gates of Rome, Rutilius Namatianus of Gaul thus addressed the imperial city in his *Itinerary:* "Hear, O Queen, fairest in all thy world, Rome, received into the starry skies! Hear, parent of men, parent of gods! in thy temples we are not far from heaven."[5] Improving on the phrase of Ovid, he gives a juster reason than that poet for the dominion exercised by the city over the world.[6] "Thou also, embracing the world in law-bringing triumphs, makest all

[1] Princeps urbium, Hor. *Od.* iv. 3. 13.

[2] Virgil, *Georgic.* ii. 534.

[3] *Urbium Nobilium Ordo.*

[4] Claudian, *Panegyris in Probum et Probinum atque Olybrium Fratres*, 124.

[5] Exaudi, regina tui pulcherrima mundi,
Inter sidereos Roma recepta polos.
Exaudi, genetrix hominum, genetrixque deorum,
Non procul a cœlo per tua templa sumus.
Rutilius, *Itinerarium*, 47.

[6] Dumque offers victis proprii consortia juris,
Urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat.—*Ibid.* 65.

These lines are doubtless a reminiscence of Ovid, *Fasti*, ii. 683:—

Gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo,
Romanis spatium est Urbis et Orbis idem.

The phrase remains in the Papal "Benedictio Urbi et Orbi."

things live by a common rule. Thee, goddess, thee, every nook that is Roman celebrates, and bends a free neck beneath thy peaceful yoke."[1] Even when sacked by the Goths, Rome appears to Rutilius as she had appeared to Horace, recalling her struggle with Hannibal. "The times which remain to thee are bounded by no goal, while the earth shall stand, while the heaven shall bear the stars. What dissolves the life of other kingdoms restores thine: the law of thy renewal is the power to grow greater through misfortune. Come then, at length, let the victim of the sacrilegious race perish; let the trembling Getæ bow their perfidious necks. Let the pacified lands pay rich tribute; let the booty of the barbarians fill thy majestic bosom."[2]

In this splendid and passionate invocation, which doubtless expressed the feelings of every provincial citizen of the Roman Empire, Rutilius is addressing Rome as the great bulwark against the tide of barbarism that threatened to submerge whatever remained of the Greek system of civilised life. To preserve and propagate the Hellenic type had been an ambition with the Romans of the Empire, not less dearly cherished than the establishment of their own dominion. So profound was their admiration for the genius of Athens that they never treated that city as a subject, but as an equal and ally; while all the Greek cities of Asia Minor, after due provision had been made for the maintenance of imperial order, were left at liberty to manage their own internal affairs. A similar tolerance was displayed in dealing with the younger cities of the

[1] Tu quoque legiferis mundum complexa triumphis
Fœdere communi vivere cuncta facis.
Te, Dea, te celebrat Romanus ubique recessus,
Pacificoque gerit libera colla jugo.
Rutilius, *Itinerarium*, 77.

[2] Quæ restant nullis obnoxia tempora metis,
Dum stabunt terræ, dum polus astra feret.
Illud te reparat quod cetera regna resolvit;
Ordo renascendi est, crescere posse malis.
Ergo, age, sacrilegæ tandem cadat hostia gentis;
Submittant trepidi perfida colla Getæ.
Ditia pacatæ dent vectigalia terræ;
Impleat augustos barbara præda sinus.—*Ibid.* 137.

Compare Horace, *Od.* iv. 4. 65, Merses profundo, pulchrior evenit, etc.

West, which were indeed bound to provide for the maintenance of schools for instructing the young citizens in the Greek encyclopædic system, but were otherwise left free to regulate their own business; the Roman franchise being extended to all who had discharged a municipal office or had served in the army. Hence till the barbarians broke through the imperial boundaries, a multitude of cities in Spain, Gaul, Britain, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, sheltered themselves in the bosom of the Roman Empire, all united by a common bond of taste and education, and each animated by some measure of local patriotism. St. Paul, who so highly valued his privileges as a Roman, felt that, as a native of Tarsus, he was a citizen of no mean city. The Athenian boasted of his famous schools till they were closed by the intolerance of Justinian. The silversmiths of Ephesus were proud of the world-wide fame of their great goddess Diana. In the West, Bordeaux rejoiced in the number and eloquence of its professors; Narbonne in the variety and picturesqueness of its costumes; Treves in the grandeur of its baths; Toulouse in the vast circuit of its brick walls; Milan in the peristyles of its houses adorned with marble statues; and Arles in its street-like bridge across the Rhone.[1]

With a surface of such external splendour, it is not surprising that Rutilius and all his pagan contemporaries, as they contemplated this vast cosmopolitan system, should have failed to perceive that the particular form of civilisation they were so anxious to preserve was nothing but the colour on the face of a corpse. But it is of the highest importance that the student of modern literature should guard himself from falling into the same error,—an error, it must be added, likely to spread, in consequence of theories as to the nature of the Renaissance in Europe, which have been ably advocated and have obtained a wide acceptance. It has been argued that, since the appearance in the world of the Christian faith, there has been a continuous conflict

[1] See the description given of these cities by Ausonius in his *Urbium Nobilium Ordo*.

between that principle and the Hellenic ideal of life; that Hellenism was, in the first instance, vanquished by Christianity, which then, for many centuries, held dominion over the barbarous mind; but that, in the fifteenth century, the principle of Hellenism sprang suddenly into fresh life, and renewed a struggle which under various forms is proceeding at the present day.

A theory of this kind seems to place a false construction on the facts of history. It misrepresents the true cause of the first decline of Hellenism; it ignores the signal service performed in the cause of civilisation by the Latin Church, in bridging by its system of education the gulf between the science of the ancient and modern worlds; it repeats the mistake of the Italian Humanists of the fifteenth century, who sought to revive the forms of ancient art without reference to the spirit which animated them. I have already dwelt on what I believe to be the real causes of the decline of true classic taste. We must now proceed to consider how much of the great classic tradition was preserved by the Church, when she became the representative and trustee of the interests transmitted to her by the Roman emperors.

II. We are so accustomed to view the first apostles and missionaries of Christianity in an exclusively religious light, that we are apt to forget that many of them were also Roman citizens, and all of them Roman subjects. They themselves never forgot this. Though the Christian Church formed from the first a self-governed community, its rulers were always mindful of their external relations to society at large. "Strangers and sojourners" Christians were, indeed, taught to consider themselves, but at the same time they were "to submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." They knew that they had in the world "no continuing city"; nevertheless their thoughts and language about this life as well as about the life to come were all coloured with the idea of citizenship. Rules for their behaviour in various secular situations were carefully laid down; they described the

course of spiritual development by metaphors borrowed from the customary employments of their fellow-citizens; when they tried to conceive of the nature of existence beyond the grave they did so under the image of a heavenly city; in philosophic thought the ideal "Republic" of Plato changed naturally into the "Civitas Dei" of Augustine. When Christianity was established as the religion of the State, it was a frequent experience for men who had discharged high municipal functions to pass to high offices in the Church. St. Ambrose, before his election as Bishop, had served in all the usual civil offices; St. Gregory in the same way had been prefect of the city; St. Augustine and St. Jerome were both of them teachers of rhetoric in the imperial schools. Not only did men thus trained in habits of civil administration bring a capacity for business into the conduct of the affairs of the Church, but in the decay of society they came to be preferred as the guardians of order above the civil officer. The letters of St. Gregory furnish a striking illustration of his activity in secular administration;[1] and the example of the Pope was doubtless followed on a smaller scale by other bishops in the different cities of the Empire.

Prominent among civil duties was the provision of public education. The Roman system of liberal education in the decline of the Empire was comprised in the encyclopædic circle of the seven arts or sciences,—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. This classification, first introduced into the Latin language by Varro, from Alexandria, gradually replaced, as has been already said, the older political education, represented by the system of Cato the Censor. For a long time it was doubtless enjoyed merely as an intellectual luxury by a few wealthy and cultivated citizens; but Quintilian shows us that in his day it was beginning to be the recognised curriculum of the schools.[2] In the fourth century decrees of the Emperor Valentinian provided for general instruction in rhetoric and grammar to be given in

[1] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, vol. v. p. 361 (Smith's edition).
[2] Quintilian, *Instit.* i. 10.

the metropolis of every province, and for the salaries, privileges, and exemptions to be enjoyed by professors of the arts.[1] Augustine and Martianus Capella treat of the seven sciences in the early part of the fifth century as the sum of liberal education. In the former we find, perhaps, the first indication of the famous distinction between the *trivium* and *quadrivium ;* the latter endeavoured to enliven the dry nature of the instruction by clothing it in a fanciful allegory. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the imperial system of education was immediately smothered by the irruption of the barbarians. The effects of the invasion were felt most severely in the country districts ; in the towns the old order of civil life lingered on, and here the influence of cultivated bishops, like Sidonius Apollinaris, was doubtless actively employed in defence of taste and learning. When the Visigoths overran the south of France (409 A.D.) they spared the schools of Narbonne, Tours, Bordeaux, Arles, and Toulouse ; the Burgundians, who affected to patronise letters, showed favour to the schools of Lyons, Vienne, Aix, and Perigneux (413 A.D.) ; and the chivalrous Franks were so indulgent, that forty years after their arrival in Gaul (A.D. 428) the regular teachers of rhetoric could still exercise their profession.[2] As late as the end of the sixth century the seven sciences, taught according to the method of Martianus Capella, appear to be holding their ground in the Bishop's school at Tours.[3]

Thus the framework of the old Hellenic form of encyclopædic education was safely transmitted from the imperial to the Church schools. And some traditions of the principles of taste and criticism must also have survived, for though the multitude of grammarians and rhetoricians in the decline of the Roman Empire in-

[1] On this subject see Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 247 (Smith's edition).

[2] Epistle of Claudianus Mamertus "Ad Sapaudum rhetorem" : "Quorum egomet studiorum quasi quandam mortem flebili velut epitaphio tumularem, nisi tute eadem venerabili professione, laudabili solertia, acri ingenio, profluente ingenio, resuscitavisses," cited by Eichhorn in his *Geschichte der Kultur und Litteratur*, vol. ii. p. 10.

[3] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 10.

troduced a vast variety into the details of teaching, yet the authorities in the different sciences were recognised, and the best text-books came to be agreed upon by a process of natural selection. Nevertheless, when liberal education passed under the control of the bishops it encountered a formidable obstacle. From very early times in the history of Christianity there had been a conflict between the school of Origen, who recommended the study of Greek poetry and philosophy, and the school of Tertullian, who condemned it. The weight of Christian opinion inclined to the latter side. "Refrain"—such was the order of the Church to the faithful—"from all the works of the heathen, for what hast thou to do with strange discourses, laws, or false prophets, which in truth turn aside from the faith those who are weak in understanding? For if thou wilt explore history, thou hast the Books of the Kings; or seekest thou for words of wisdom and eloquence, thou hast the Prophets, Job, and the Book of Proverbs, wherein thou shalt find a more perfect knowledge of all eloquence and wisdom, for they are the voice of the Lord, the only wise God; or dost thou long for tuneful strains, thou hast the Psalms; or to explore the origin of things, thou hast the Book of Genesis; or for customs and observances, thou hast the excellent Law of the Lord God. Wherefore abstain scrupulously from all strange and devilish books."[1]

How then were the teachers of the schools of the West to reconcile these instructions with the study of the seven liberal sciences? The study of rhetoric involved the study of grammar, and grammar, from the time of Quintilian down to that of Cassiodorus, had been treated as including both logic and style. "Grammar," says the latter, "is the accomplishment of speaking eloquently gathered from the illustrious orators and poets."[2] To study grammar was, accordingly, to study the works of the best heathen authors, and hence to disregard the prevailing

[1] Mullinger's *Schools of Charles the Great*, p. 8.

[2] Grammatica est peritia pulchre loquendi ex poetis illustribus oratoribusque collecta.—Migne, lxxix. 1152.

policy of the Church. Confronted with such an alternative there could be little doubt what would be the choice of men accustomed to live in daily expectation of the end of the world. To many of the Fathers, indeed, the struggle between devotion and taste was severe. St. Jerome tells us of the refreshment he found during his prolonged fasts in reading the works of Cicero and Plautus; but one evening, having fallen asleep, he dreamed that he was carried into heaven and heard a voice saying to him: "Ciceronianus es non Christianus; ubi enim thesaurus tuus ibi est cor tuum."[1] After this he religiously laid aside his favourite authors as temptations of the Evil One. His example was improved on in later times. When Desiderius, Archbishop of Vienne, made an effort to revive the study of the ancient authors as the best instruments of liberal instruction in grammar, he was reproved by Gregory the Great, who expressed his grief that Desiderius should instruct his pupils in that subject, "inasmuch," said he, "as the praises of Christ cannot be uttered by the same tongue as those of Jove."[2] When learning began to revive under Charlemagne, Alcuin, himself the director of liberal studies, forbade the reading of Virgil in the monastery over which he presided. "The sacred poets," he tells his disciples, "are enough for you: you need not let your imagination be sullied with the too luxuriant eloquence of Virgil's style."[3] On one occasion some young monks in the Abbey delighted themselves with the secret study of the poet. Alcuin heard of it and sent for one of them. "How is this, *Virgilian*," said he, in obvious allusion to St. Jerome's anecdote, "that without my knowledge, and against my orders, you have begun to study Virgil?" The monk threw himself at his feet, and with promises to abstain in future from such stolen pleasures, prayed for forgiveness which was hardly granted him.[4]

But however powerful this principle might be in itself, and in its effects on individual minds, the ideal was a

[1] *Epistola ad Eustochium.*
[2] Mullinger, *Schools of Charles the Great*, p. 77.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 110.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 113.

survival from the first monastic age of Christianity, and only suited to a society secluded from the world. For Christianity established as the religion of the State, for a Church which aspired to direct the thoughts of kings, to define the faith in General Councils, to deal with schisms and heresies, it was soon perceived that something more of art and knowledge was required than sufficed for simple devotional exercises. It was not enough that the clergy should be able to read the Scriptures, to copy MSS. of the Fathers, to calculate the fall of Easter, and to join in the music of the Church services, though little else than this had been aimed at in the schools of Benedict and Cassian. The Church under Charlemagne began to revive the decayed tradition of the encyclopædic education inherited from the Roman Empire, and to adapt it to her own purposes. An interesting example of the compromise effected by the union of the two principles remains in the catalogue of the library at York preserved in the verses of Alcuin :—

Illic invenies veterum vestigia Patrum ;
Quidquid habet pro se Latio Romanus in orbe ;
Græcia vel quidquid transmisit clara Latinis ;
Hebraicus vel quod populus bibit imbre superno ;
Africa lucifluo vel quidquid lumine sparsit.
Quid pater Hieronymus, quod sensit Hilarius atque
Ambrosius, præsul, simul Augustinus, et ipse
Sanctus Athanasius, quod Orosius edit avitus ;
Quidquid Gregorius summus docet, et Leo papa ;
Basilius quidquid Fulgentius atque coruscant.
Cassiodorus item, Chrysostomus atque Joannes,
Quidquid et Althelmus docuit, quod Beda magister,
Quæ Victorinus scripsere, Boetius, atque
Historici veteres, Pompeius, Plinius, ipse
Acer Aristoteles, rhetor quoque Tullius ingens.
Quid quoque Sedulius, vel quid canit ipse Juvencus,
Alcuinus et Clemens, Prosper, Paulinus, Arator,
Quid Fortunatus, vel quid Lactantius edunt,
Quid Maro Virgilius, Statius, Lucanus et auctor :
Artis Grammaticæ vel quid scripsere magistri,
Quid Probus atque Phocas, Donatus, Priscianusque,
Servius, Euticius, Pompeius, Comminianus.
Invenies alios perplures, lector, ibidem
Egregios studiis, arte et sermone magistros.

> Plurima qui claro scripsere volumina sensu,
> Nomina sed quorum præsenti in carmine scribi
> Longius est visum quam plectri postulat usus.[1]

It is scarcely too much to say that in this exceedingly valuable list we find a record of the various elements that combined to form the imagination of the Middle Ages. It represents the intermediate stage of scholastic education, in its transition from the pagan traditions, familiar to Sidonius Apollinaris, to that complete system which attained its climax with St. Thomas Aquinas. The great philosophical controversies which divided the Church, and brought the logic of the Schoolmen to confirm the authority of the Fathers, had not yet arisen; hence the rhetorical character of the education still prevails over the scientific; nevertheless we can plainly discern the "disjecta membra" of the seven liberal arts. Priscian, Donatus, and others supply the text-books for technical instruction in grammar, while the models of rhetoric are looked for in a crowd of second-rate Christian poets, who wrote on Biblical subjects in the fourth and fifth centuries, and occupy a place in the list superior to Virgil, Statius, and Lucan. Ovid, the most popular of all Latin poets in the Middle Ages, is not mentioned, probably because his name presented metrical difficulties. The mention of the "keen Aristotle" seems to point to the *De Interpretatione* of that philosopher translated by Boethius; but the whole treatment of Dialectic by Alcuin and others shows that Logic as an art was as yet little regarded in the education of the time. Still less attention was given to the sciences included in the Quadrivium, and probably all Alcuin's acquaintance with them was derived either from Boethius,—who had translated the Arithmetic of Nicomachus, and the first four books of Euclid, and who had written a treatise on Music,—or from the twenty books of *Etymologiarum* composed by Isidore of Seville, whose own acquirements in astronomy did not carry him much beyond the knowledge that the sun was larger than the earth. As to other

[1] Poema de Pontificibus et Sanctis Ecclesiæ Eboracensis.—Migne, ci. 843-4.

branches of secular instruction the list bears witness to the great authority of Pliny the Elder, whose *Historia Naturalis* was first condensed in the Encyclopædia of Isidore of Seville, and then partitioned among the numerous Bestiaries, Lapidaries, and Herbaries, which for many centuries provided the curious reader with a smattering of science. But almost the most striking feature in the library is the absence of any work of Greek or Roman history. The policy of Eusebius, whose aim was to discredit the records of pagan culture, has borne its fruit, and, till the Renaissance and the invention of printing, men's knowledge of the course of human events was mainly derived from the meagre chronicles of Jerome and Orosius.

In surveying the long course of intellectual evolution we have just been describing, the least imaginative mind can hardly fail to be impressed with the marks of order and design. A group of free states, confined within narrow limits, but highly favoured by genius and natural advantages, produce for the admiration of mankind examples of poetry, oratory, sculpture, and the other arts of life which have never since been equalled. But, with powers dwarfed and restricted by their mutual jealousies, they are unable to propagate the ideas they have originated. The fruits of their art and philosophy, systematically arranged under the great military power which has deprived them of their liberties, are carried into the cities of the South and the East. When the energies of the Macedonian Monarchy seem to be almost exhausted, the system of culture which has grown up in Alexandria is adopted by the Roman Republic, still in the vigour of its free civic life, and is established by its conquering arms, side by side with a universal system of justice and order, in the northern and western confines of the Empire. Nevertheless the vast fabric of Roman civilisation must have perished through internal decay, had not the moral life of the world been regenerated by the establishment of Christianity, and new sources of political freedom been sup-

plied by the irruption of the barbarians. Nor could these alone have provided for the growth of human society, if the barbarians had been of a temper less sensible of the grandeur of the order they had overthrown, or if the ideal of Tertullian and Eusebius had prevailed in the government of the Church. From both these dangers Europe was saved, partly because Latin was the native language of the clergy, and partly because the Church had inherited the duties of the State with regard to public instruction. A slender stream of ancient culture was thus allowed to trickle through the unfertilising channel of encyclopædic education. Under this system, modified by various influences, Dante, John de Meung, Chaucer, and the English poets of the fifteenth century were trained in a twofold course, half rhetorical, half dialectical, and wholly characteristic of what are called the Middle Ages, since on its logical side it led directly to the philosophy of the Schoolmen, and on its rhetorical side to the movement of the Renaissance.

Whether the question presents itself to us in its secular or its ecclesiastical aspect, it may be regarded as certain that, in this continuous stream of education, first Greek, then Græco-Roman, then Roman-Christian, we find the controlling force which has, in one form or another, guided the imagination and judgment of every generation of poets from the days of Augustus down to our own era.

III. But it is just at this point that we arrive at the most difficult part of the problem. Granted that, through the history of what we call "liberal" education, we are brought into immediate relation with the intellectual life of the pre-Christian world, no such line of connection has yet been established between the traditions of Christian and pagan poetry. Indeed, so fresh and original appear the earliest metrical compositions in the vulgar tongues of modern Europe, so opposite too in character to the spirit of Latin poetry, that scholars have generally been content to regard them as the natural out-growth of barbarian genius, unaffected by the arts of past civilisation. Latin literature is supposed

to have died with Boethius; the succeeding centuries are named the Dark Ages; a fresh poetical departure is then assumed to have been made in the eleventh century of our era. Nevertheless it has been generally felt that an explanation ought to be furnished of the extraordinary difference, as well as of the close resemblance, between classical and modern poetry; and this was a subject which greatly occupied the minds of scholars at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. Unfortunately the points of really essential difference were never accurately defined, and hence the discussion rambled into speculative theories respecting the derivation of knights, giants, enchanters, fairies, magic armour and the like, without ever making for the real heart of the question. The debate began with Thomas Warton's interesting Dissertation, prefixed to *The History of English Poetry*, on "The Origin of Romantic Fiction."[1] Bishop Percy had traced the origin of romantic poetical "machinery" to the poets of Scandinavia.[2] Warton, on the other hand, following Huet and Warburton, ascribed it to the Arabians, who, he imagined, communicated it to Europe through Spain and Sicily. A third school regarded the romantic superstitions of the Middle Ages as the metamorphosed remains of classic mythology.[3] These conflicting opinions were ridiculed by Joseph Ritson, who maintained that what the other scholars had supposed to be conscious artistic inventions were nothing but the "natural superstitions" common to all nations in an early stage of existence.[4]

All this was very unsatisfactory. To assume that the predominating element in modern poetry was "romantic fiction," and that the essence of romance was magic and adventure, was to start with most inadequate definitions. Ritson's dogma, that fictions, like those found in the old romances, were common to all nations in their infancy, was a piece of arrogant insolence. On

[1] *History of English Poetry*, vol. i. Dissertation 1.
[2] *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. iii. p. 3.
[3] Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, vol. i. p. 122.
[4] Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, p. xix.

the other hand, the theories that these fictions were the products of Scandinavian or Celtic folk lore, that they were borrowed from the Arabians, that they were the natural products of Christian as opposed to pagan genius, ignored the extremely complex character of the romantic style. Gothic architecture has a character radically distinct from classic architecture, yet no one has ever ventured to suggest that the former was the spontaneous outgrowth of the Teutonic mind, or that its development was not to be considered in connection with the history of architecture as a whole.

At the beginning of the present century John Dunlop, author of *The History of Fiction*, made some very sensible remarks on these various hypotheses. "In the investigation of this subject," says he, "a considerable confusion seems to have arisen from the supporters of the respective systems having blended those elements of romance which ought to be referred to separate origins. They have mixed together, or at least have made no proper distinction between three things which seem, at least in their elementary principles, to be totally unconnected: (1) The arbitrary fictions of romance, by which I mean the embellishment of dragons, enchanters, etc.; (2) That spirit of enterprise and adventure which pervaded all the tales of chivalry; (3) The historical materials, if they deserve the name, relating to Arthur and Charlemagne, which form the groundwork of so large a proportion of this class of composition."[1]

Dunlop, while admitting an element of truth in the speculations of each of his predecessors, urged, and justly, that all of them had overlooked the important part played by feudal institutions in the determination of the problem as he had stated it. His own method of reasoning on the subject is lucid and orderly, and it was perhaps sufficient for his purpose, which was the History of Romantic Fiction. But Romantic Fiction is only one element in the History of Modern Poetry, and an element, moreover, inseparably blended with other principles, from

[1] Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, vol. i. p. 116 (edition of 1888).

which it must be detached before its origin can be fully and correctly explained. The question belongs, in fact, to the history of social thought, and the radical differences, as well as the subtle affinities, between classic and romantic poetry properly so called, must be examined as a change effected in the mind of Europe, in its transition from the system of the Roman Empire to the system of the Middle Ages.

That which constitutes the essential difference in character between the poetry of Greece and Rome and the poetry of the nations of mediæval Europe, is the opposite point of view from which each regards man and nature. From this circumstance, the consequence of a change in the religious belief of the more powerful races of the world, arises a difference in the mythological method which is the parent cause of all poetry. Mythology may be defined as the body of fable created by nations in an early stage of their existence to account for the origin of the world and the history of society. In such fables the poets of a later date find the materials for (1) the invention of supernatural machinery; (2) the representation of epic and dramatic action. This principle applies to all the poetry of Greece and Rome, and though it has worked less exclusively on the imagination of Christendom, still the influence of a belief in superhuman agency is manifest enough in poems like the *Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*, and in such plays as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, the *Midsummer Night's Dream;* while the *Canterbury Tales*, *Orlando Furioso*, *The Faery Queen*, and the plots of the Elizabethan dramatists, are monuments of the use of romantic legend by poets of Latin-Teutonic descent. I shall endeavour in this section to illustrate the results of the variation of mythological method under each of the two heads I have indicated above.

(1) The prevailing feature in Greek mythology is its humanity. Whether the gods are described in their repose or in their action, the Greek poets invest them with the fine serenity that elevates the composition of their sculpture,—a feeling embodied even in that passage of swift motion in the *Iliad* representing Poseidon's passage

over the sea which Longinus selected as the highest type of the sublime ;[1] in Aristophanes' incomparable picture of the cloud-goddesses rising from the waves to float in light vapours round the mountain-tops, whence they look down on the low-lying earth ;[2] in the charming narrative of Herodotus recording how Pan appeared in the mountain solitudes to the runner on his way to Sparta to ask aid for the Athenians before the battle of Marathon.[3] Even when the Greek gods are represented as engaged in battle they are still placable, indeed humorous beings, possessing the same qualities as their human favourites, though in a higher degree. The heart of Pluto himself is not insensible to the charms of music. It is only when the moral law is violated that we find an intervention of the more abstract and terrible powers, Ate, Nemesis, and the Eumenides. As a rule the Greek thought of his gods as patrons and guardians, under whose protection he might place his house or his city ; he built altars to them by the forest side or the running stream ; and he introduced them into his dramas only when the situation became too complicated for solution by the agency of mere mortal men.

This strong human element in Greek religion was the product of several causes. It arose partly from the interpretation of nature in the natural light of polytheism ; partly from the creativeness of the Greek mind ; partly from the absence of all the restrictions imposed by inspired religious books. When the religious feeling grew cold, and when the interpretation of nature was felt to be inadequate, the Greeks had little difficulty in parting with stories which rested on no authority higher than oral tradition. The easy rationalism they introduced into their religion is well illustrated by the explanation of the myth of Boreas and Orithyia referred to by Plato at the opening of the *Phædrus*.[4] We feel instinctively that a faith of this kind would have been too shallow to have ever created the supernatural machinery of modern poetry. Let the Olympus of Homer be compared with the *Paradiso* of

[1] *Iliad*, xiii. 17-31.
[2] Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 275.
[3] Herodotus, vi. 105.
[4] Plato, *Phædrus*, p. 229.

Dante, the Nekuomanteia of the *Odyssey* with the *Inferno*, and the different moral aspect under which nature is viewed becomes at once apparent. There is nothing in the genius of polytheism akin to the powers in Christian literature, terrible, grotesque, or malignant, like the demons of Dante or the witches of Shakespeare; to those superhuman passions, dark and tragic, like the agony of remorse, hatred, and despair felt by Satan, as he gazes upon Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The causes that determine the character of mediæval mythology are, first, that it is the invention of the mind interpreting nature through the medium of a written Revelation; secondly, that it has absorbed certain elements of a suppressed polytheism; and, thirdly, that in the place of polytheism it has substituted the principle of dualism. Instead of being, like Greek mythology, the spontaneous invention of a single race, the mythology of the Middle Ages was a vast accumulation of the literary ideas of many civilisations, which for centuries kept pouring into the interpretation of one sacred text, not only their own native fancies, but the glosses of commentators, the theories of philosophers, the memories of ancient superstitions, and even the inventions of deliberate forgers.

In considering the elements of this remarkable compound, it will be well to examine, in the first place, those which seem to have been contributed by the older forms of polytheism. The result of such an inquiry proves conclusively how untenable is the opinion of critics who hold with Ritson that the romantic fictions, prevalent in Europe in the twelfth century, are merely examples of folk lore common to all nations in a state of infancy. There is not in English poetry proper, nor indeed in the poetry of any nation containing elements derived from the Latin race, a single work which, like the *Nibelungenlied* of Germany, can be said to owe either its fable or its supernatural machinery exclusively to the polytheistic mythology of the ancient tribe. The whole of the superhuman framework of European poetry dates from a period subsequent to the conversion of the different barbarous races to Christianity. Yet our poetry is not without

traces of the older creed. To look on the heathen gods as mere creations of fancy would not have been in accordance with the views of nature held by the early propagators of the gospel; nor indeed, had they themselves been of this opinion, could they, as Christian missionaries, have persuaded their converts to share it with them. The existence of the deities, alike of the Greek citizen and the German tribesman, had in some manner to be explained, and, as a rule, the explanation was given in one of two ways. The Christian apostle at times pursued the line of thought which had been started by the Platonic philosophy, and refined away the personality of Jupiter, Mercury, and Minerva into delusive phantoms or idols (εἴδωλα).[1] This was a method of reasoning best adapted to the subtlety of the civilised mind. Ruder measures were required in dealing with the deeper rooted notions of the Greek or Roman villager and of the German barbarian. Any god, powerful enough to be worshipped in a sacred place or with an altar, was treated as an open enemy, and classed with "the devil and his angels." To these no indulgence was extended. They were banished from the earth; and even the memory of Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn — of Wotan, Thor, and Freia—was allowed to survive only in the days of the week or in the names of the planets.

But there were certain elements in the polytheistic creeds which could not be disposed of in this trenchant fashion. Now and then the missionaries encountered customs which were harmless in themselves, and to which the people were devotedly attached; deities endeared to the worshipper by some peculiar tradition of benevolence; beautiful and pathetic legends of the intercourse between gods and men from which the imagination was loth to part. Beliefs and institutions like these were

[1] Compare 1 Corinthians viii. 4-6: "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him." Fulgentius, the grammarian, in later days classified the heathen gods according to their qualities; and his interpretations, which were much in vogue in the Middle Ages, form the basis of Lydgate's poem, *The Assembly of the Gods*.

too strong to be utterly destroyed, and could only be suppressed by being transformed. Conversion was accordingly the course adopted. Images and shrines of Minerva or Venus were consecrated to the Virgin; the Teutonic goddess Hellia gave her name to the abode of the devil; but another goddess, Ostara or Eostra, furnished the English name for the festival of Easter; and the heathen custom of fire-lighting at different times of the year was sanctioned by devoting it to the saint of the season.[1] Many stories were current of the travels of the Greek and German gods among mankind; to the missionaries who laboured among the barbarous races there seemed no impropriety in allowing these legends to be transferred to the persons of the Holy Trinity.[2] Nor did they wage any relentless war against the lesser powers of nature who were allowed to remain in possession of the air, the mountains, the rivers, and the mines, thus providing the English poets with a supernatural machinery of which the finest example is the *Midsummer Night's Dream.* It was different with the beings, whatever their kind, which derived their power from magic, for that was under the ban of the Church. Fays, enchanters, wizards, and witches, were all the servants of the devil; in whose service are engaged also the weird sisters who tempt Macbeth, though their actual originals are the more sublime Norns or Fates, who, in the German mythology, weave the web of destiny.

When allowance has been made for all the elements contributed to mediæval mythology by polytheism, it is still evident that by much the larger part of the "machinery" employed by the Christian poets is derived from written documents illustrative of the Christian religion. It must not be supposed, however, that the impersonation of the celestial or superhuman actors in modern European poetry is drawn immediately from the Bible, in the same way that the idea of the Greek gods is

[1] One of the most curious instances of conversion is the transfer to the patronage of Helena, the sainted mother of Constantine, of the Fire of St. Helena, the phenomenon ascribed by the Greek sailors to the influence of Helen, sister of Castor and Pollux.

[2] An example remains in the *Andreas* of Cynewulf.

based upon the poems of Homer. In one sense the fixity of a written religion imposes a limit on imagination; but in another the authority attaching to every word of the inspired writings gives an opportunity to the myth-making faculty, inherent in human nature, of reading into the text meanings beyond what it seems superficially intended to convey. No Scripture was of private interpretation; but the inward spirit of the letter needed to be explained by the doctors who had given themselves up to the long study of its mysterious truths. A conspicuous result of this kind of interpretation is found in the Commentary of Gregory the Great on the Book of Job, in one passage of which he says that even the mention of particular times and seasons in the Bible is meant to have a moral significance. Thus, when we are told in the Gospel narrative of the events leading to the Crucifixion, that Peter stood at a fire of coals, for it was winter, and warmed himself, this is symbolical of the coldness of heart that led the apostle to deny Christ; and again there is allegory in the fact that the angels visit Abraham at mid-day, but enter Sodom by night.[1] It is plain that a similar method of reasoning employed on the text of Scripture with equal freedom and confidence, has created the whole cycle of legend, embodied in the poetical treatment of the devil and the celestial hierarchy, which makes so striking a figure in mediæval literature.

The formation of this great legend was exceedingly gradual. There is indeed manifest in the Bible the germ of that dualism on which the later poetical mythology is based.[2] There is also ample warrant for personifying the Power of Evil; for attributing to him his two leading qualities of tempter (ὁ πειράζων) and accuser (ὁ διάβολος); and even for identifying him with the deceiving serpent in the garden of Eden. But Satan nowhere distinctly

[1] *Commentary on Book of Job*, lib. ii. cap. 2.

[2] To say nothing of the plainly mystical narrative of the Fall of Man, compare such texts as Deuteronomy xxx. 15, 19: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. . . . I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing"; and Romans vii. 21: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

appears in Bible history as the leader of the rebel angels; and the account of his attempt to set himself up as the rival of God, and of his fall, as well as the character assigned to him of emperor of the evil spirits; the distinct description of his abode; and the representations of his dealings with mankind; are all mythological conceptions founded partly on the ingenious collocation of scattered texts, and partly on the authority of apocryphal Scriptures.

There is, I believe, no appearance of this portion of the Satanic legend in Christian literature before the poem of Avitus, *De Originali Peccato*, composed towards the end of the fifth century. But from the distinct and definite form which it there assumes, it is clear that it must have been a long time in general circulation, and I have little doubt that Baron Rothschild is justified in ascribing its origin to Magian ideas which incorporated themselves in the Græco-Jewish literature of Alexandria before the Christian era.[1] It is at any rate certain that, having once found its way into the modern languages of Europe, it is always reproduced with the same unvarying features. Long before Dante painted the circles of the *Inferno*, an Anglo-Saxon poet—whether Cædmon or some other is doubtful and immaterial—had furnished in his *Paraphrase of Genesis* a striking narrative—containing the germ of *Paradise Lost*—of the events culminating in the fall of man. He describes the rebellion and expulsion from heaven of the proud angels; the creation of the earth to fill the void left in the system of the universe; the debate of the devils as to the measures to be taken against the new work of the Creator; the mission of one of them to tempt man to disobedience; the arguments employed vainly to seduce Adam, successfully to persuade Eve. It is scarcely necessary to say that none of these incidents are to be found in the narrative of

[1] *Le Mystère du Vieil Testament*, vol. i. pp. xli. xlii. The tradition must have been familiar to the author of the *Book of Wisdom*, who says (chap. ii. 24), "Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it." St. Jude also alludes to it: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (ver. 6).

Scripture, and that not one of them is the original invention of Cædmon. The latter, no doubt, had studied the poem of Avitus, but his poem presents in a characteristically Teutonic form and spirit the materials he found in the Commentaries of Gregory the Great, where imagination is seen at work in a manner that vividly suggests the process by which the legend was gradually formed.

St. John in the Apocalypse had said that "the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven."[1] The image itself may have been suggested by some ancient Jewish tradition of whatever origin, but from it the conclusion was drawn that these angels had once occupied a definite district in heaven, from which they were expelled in consequence of a rebellion. Again, from the text, "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north," Gregory taught that the north was peculiarly the devil's quarter, and after him Cædmon believed that the devil had once reigned in the north part of heaven.[2] For the same reason the Anglo-Saxon poet represents Eve, after she has eaten the apple, telling Adam that she has been thereby enabled to see God sitting in the south-east of heaven.[3] Like Dante, Cædmon conceives that Satan, after his expulsion, assumed a horrible and brutish form, and this idea is repeated in all the representations of the fall of Lucifer preserved in the English miracle plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was left to Milton to present the unequalled image of gradually fading angelic power—

> His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared
> Less than archangel ruined.

[1] Revelation xii. 7, 8.

[2] Isaiah xiv. 13. *Commentary on the Book of Job*, lib. xvii. c. 24. Cædmon, *Metrical Paraphrase*, 3. 8 (Thorpe's edition). Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (Stallybrass), vol. iii. 1001, seems to think that this passage in Cædmon is based on a reminiscence of Teutonic mythology ; but it is surely much more reasonable to suppose that the poet was acquainted with Gregory's Commentary on Job.

[3] Cædmon, *Metrical Paraphrase* (Thorpe's edition), 41. 34.

But Milton himself could cite authority for this idea of surviving brightness by coupling the text, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" with the verse in Isaiah, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"[1]

At a date somewhat later than the production of Avitus' poem, somewhat before the publication of Gregory's *Homilies*, a fresh contribution from a different quarter was made to the mythology of the subject. The constant expectation of the approaching end of the material world in which the early Christians lived produced in them a corresponding eagerness to obtain a clear knowledge of the life beyond the grave, reserved respectively for the righteous and the wicked. But in the text of Scripture this knowledge remained wrapped in impenetrable mystery. Except in the figurative language of the Apocalypse, there was little or nothing, in the inspired Word, to enable the mind to form an image of the future kingdom of the saints, and, in the absence of a direct revelation, religious curiosity naturally formed an alliance with metaphysics. The Platonic philosophy, having by its picturesque treatment of the doctrine of Ideas, made men familiar with the conception of a semi-personal constitution in the order of the unseen world, the needs of human nature rendered it almost certain that some writer would attempt to graft on this system of philosophy the authority of Revelation. In due time the necessary link between Platonism and Christianity was furnished by the writings ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, of whom tradition relates that, after his conversion by St. Paul, he was consecrated Bishop of Athens and died a martyr for the faith. The works professing to be his, namely, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Interpretation of Celestial Names*, and *The Mystical Theology*, were in all probability the composition of some Christian Neo-Platonist of the fifth century; they were certainly cited publicly for the first time at a conference in the Palace of Constantinople between the Catholics and the Servians, A.D. 532. Coming, as was reported, from the personal friend and disciple of the apostle who had been caught

[1] Isaiah xiv. 12 and Luke x. 18.

up into the third heaven, they soon acquired immense authority in the Church, and, being translated into Latin in the ninth century by Scotus Erigena, were treated by the Schoolmen as having the authority of Revelation. According to the teaching of Dionysius, between the Godhead, Trinity in Unity, and the world of man, there intervenes a celestial hierarchy consisting of three orders: Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones—Dominations, Virtues, and Powers—Principalities, Archangels, and Angels—of which orders the last, being nearest to mankind, are God's appointed messengers to our race. Each division of this hierarchy is minutely described by the writer; and in later ages it was believed, probably on the authority of the Cabbala, that each of the nine spheres surrounding the earth was under the government of one of these angels. No reader of Dante or Milton requires to be reminded that, from the imagery thus supplied (coupled, in the case of the *Divine Comedy*, with the planetary scheme of the astronomer Ptolemy), is taken the topography of the *Paradiso* and the angelic machinery of *Paradise Lost*.

The authority of Dionysius thus enabled the imagination to localise and render human the abstract idea of heaven. Nor were men left to evolve the mythology of hell by mere inference from the text of the Bible. An apocryphal document, analogous in origin and character to the writings of the Areopagite, furnished evidence of those last acts of the Saviour which the sacred narrative veils in mystery. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a translation, professedly made by one Æneas in the reign of Valentinian, of more ancient writings in Hebrew composed almost immediately after the events that they describe. It is in two parts, of which the first, relating the acts of Pilate, is merely an expansion of the history of the Evangelists; but the second, and more striking, records the incidents of Christ's descent into hell. The Jewish doctors being in council after the Crucifixion, news was brought to them of the resurrection of many dead persons who had been seen on the banks of Jordan. Among these were the two sons of the aged Simeon who had blessed the infant

Saviour in the Temple, and they, it was said, could render an account of the miraculous occurrence. The risen men, Leucius and Carinus, were found by the Jews sitting in their house at Arimathæa. Adjured to speak, they made the sign of the cross on their tongues, and beckoned for writing materials. They were then placed in separate rooms, where they completed their narratives at the same moment; and these, on being compared, proved to be word for word alike.[1] The text of this Gospel, constructed with great ingenuity from Messianic verses in the Psalms and the Prophets, describes, in a style often powerful and poetical, the state of the departed spirits imprisoned in hell under the guardianship of Satan, Hades, and Beelzebub, whose discourses concerning the Crucifixion are reported. It relates how a great light was seen approaching, and how the summons was heard at the entrance of hell: "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in"; how in spite of the resistance of Satan and his peers, the Saviour entered and released the spirits of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, together with a multitude of others, including the writers of the narrative. This Gospel deeply impressed the imagination of the Middle Ages, and became the foundation of numerous poems and dramas, from the days of Cædmon to those of Langland and the authors of the York, Towneley, Chester, and Coventry Mysteries. Later stories, told by saints who had passed into hell, reflect the vividness with which the imagination in the early and middle ages of Christianity supplied a substitute for the silence of revelation in legends about the unseen world. Such is the tale told by Gregory the Great to Peter the Archdeacon concerning Stephen; the spiritual experiences of Alberic of Monte Casino; the vision of Drihthelm related by Bede; the narrative of St. Patrick's passage into Purgatory, and of the voyage of St. Brandan; not to mention the more profane

[1] There are considerable variations in the narrative of the events which led to the composition of the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, as recorded in the Greek and Latin versions of the Gospel. I have followed the second Latin version, which is, on the whole, the most striking.

Fabliau of the troubadour who, entering hell, played at dice with the devil for certain souls. All the elements, grand, terrible, and grotesque in these "Descents" are summed up in Dante's *Inferno*.

The substitution in mythology of dualism for polytheism tended, of course, greatly to restrict the number of the supernatural personages in poetry, where, however, the vacant room was to some extent filled by a new class of spiritual agents, namely, allegorical characters. When Jupiter, Minerva, Venus, and Mars, with all the rest of the deities of Olympus disappeared, mediæval verse began to swarm with abstractions such as Love, Eld, Nature, Genius, Danger, Jealousy, the Seven Deadly Sins, all of them the numerous offspring of Allegory. As I shall have occasion hereafter to consider the causes that led to the growth of Allegorical Poetry, it will be sufficient to say here that supernatural agency of this kind finds no place in the Greek epic or drama, being indeed fundamentally opposed to the Greek conception of Nature. It derives its origin partly from the first principles of the Platonic philosophy, partly from the union of these principles with the allegorical interpretation of Scripture first effected by Philo Judæus, and partly from the frequency with which the Latin poets, following the genius of their race, introduced abstract persons into their verse. The first poetical product of these various conspiring causes was the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius. A new literary precedent was thus formed, and a further impulse was given to allegorical composition, by the great popularity of two works in which abstract personages were introduced as agents: Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, a favourite text-book of morality in the Christian schools, and Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology*, a treatise which sought to enliven by a connected fiction the exceedingly dry course of encyclopædic education. When the first attempts were made to compose metrically in the vulgar tongues of Europe, these were the models to which the poets naturally turned. A description of the allegorical characters of the *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* is found in the

poem on Boethius, the oldest surviving monument of French poetry, composed perhaps in the tenth century; while the influence both of Boethius and of Martianus Capella, transmitted through the *De Planctu Naturæ* and the *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis, is distinctly visible in the numerous abstract agents in *The Romance of the Rose.*

(2) The gradual literary evolution, which we have now traced through the supernatural side of mediæval mythology, has its exact counterpart in the history of the growth of mediæval legend. Greek heroic fable, like the Greek religion, is the offspring of the Greek mind; but the great cycles of fiction which lie at the root of European poetry are the product of a course of transformation marked by three main stages: first, the decay in the Roman Empire of philosophical history; secondly, the replacement of the civil type of history by the ecclesiastical chronicle; thirdly, the union between the ecclesiastical chronicle and the principle of romance.

When we endeavour to form in our imaginations an idea of social and intellectual life in the latter days of the Roman Empire, as described in the first section of this chapter, we see at once that it must have borne a certain resemblance to the democratic conditions under which we ourselves live. Then, as now, the inhabitants of Europe recognised a common code of civilisation, forming them into one society in respect of certain moral usages and sentiments; so that a man who could speak both Greek and Latin would have found as little inconvenience in settling in any part of the Roman Empire, as an Englishman who, with a knowledge of the language, should choose to make his home in Germany or Italy. Moreover, in both societies we observe the great power of the principle of equality, and as "under the Empire" all distinctions of country or language tended to merge themselves in the larger idea of Roman citizenship, so now it is not uncommon, especially among men of a scientific turn of thought, to disregard the barriers of nationality in view of the unity of the human race. In the Roman Empire, as in democratic Europe, the desire

of extracting the greatest amount of material enjoyment from the present moment was one of the most powerful of human motives; and the love of novelty and change threatens in our own day to destroy all traditional standards in art, literature, and morals, just as it destroyed them in the city states of Greece and Rome.

But, while in these respects there is much resemblance between the civilisation of the Roman Empire and that of modern Europe, they differ in one essential principle, namely, that Peace, formerly preserved by the predominance of one imperial power, now depends upon the balanced interests of rival nations. The principles of national independence and of civil liberty, therefore, combine to check the operation of the principle of individual equality in the historic societies of Europe, in a manner unknown under the Roman Empire. Though the forces of steam and electricity gratify the passion of the modern Quidnunc for hearing and learning "some new thing," to an extent which would have excited the envy of the citizen of Athens; and though, in consequence, the art of journalism promises to absorb many of the functions of the older forms of literature; still, so long as each individual feels that his own enjoyment of life is largely dependent on the place held by his country in the councils of Europe, history, poetry, and ethical philosophy will continue to appeal to the human imagination. In the imperial civilisation of Rome no such preservative existed. When the liberties of all individual states sank under the predominance of one protecting power, every motive for individual exertion disappeared. The members of each community with languid indifference watched their freedom being transferred from the keeping of one imperial master to another. No breath of honourable political ambition, no patriotic memory of the past, stirred the sluggish surface of their lives. Even their commercial fortunes were reared on the basis of slavery. Imagination ceased to discharge its nobler functions. It occupied itself with the daily gossip of the bath, with the depraved scandal of society, at best with the excitement of litiga-

tion ; the rope-dancer, the gladiator, and the reciter dispelled for a moment the *ennui* of minds too inert to feel an interest in the ideal action of the drama.

The stages of this torpid degeneration in Roman taste are reflected in the decline of history. What had moved the imagination of the older school of Greek and Roman historians was the fortune of their several states, whether they wrote like Livy in the temper of patriots and poets, like Tacitus as moralists, or like Thucydides as philosophers. The cosmopolitan Roman, in the decline of the Empire, had no sympathy with these political motives. His main desire in life was to be amused. Amusement might be extracted from the personal side of history, hence a new species of history, dating from Suetonius, arose, which occupied itself with comparatively recent events and biographical gossip, and seems to have reached the depths of degeneracy in the *Scriptores Historiæ Augustæ* under Diocletian. Another class of readers regarded history as a branch of encyclopædic culture, and wished to extend their information with as little mental exertion as possible; their tastes were gratified with a multitude of handbooks and abridgments, like that composed by Florus, who wrote under Trajan, or the abstract of Eutropius which, composed in the reign of Valens, is still used in the lower forms of English public schools.

The destruction of the older type of civil history was completed by a vigorous antagonistic force to which I have already incidentally alluded. The *Chronicles* of the Christian historians Eusebius and Jerome were written with the deliberate purpose of superseding the records of Hellenic culture. The object of the *General Chronology* of the former was to show that the books of Moses claimed a higher antiquity than any writings of the Greeks ; while the character of St. Jerome's *Chronicle* may be inferred from his own description. He tells us that from Ninus and Abraham to the capture of Troy his work is a strict translation of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius ; from Troy to the twentieth year of Constantine's reign, the meagreness of the narrative is only relieved by a few

personal details mainly taken from the *Lives of the Cæsars* by Suetonius.

When the barbarians broke through the barriers of the Roman Empire, they doubtless brought with them many memories of their own past, enshrined in such songs and poems as those of the Franks, which Charlemagne, according to his biographer, was anxious to preserve in a collected form. These were soon dissolved by the superior charms of Latin civilisation. In their place the barbarians accepted the written accounts of the history of the world provided by the Church for their instruction, and ten centuries added but little to the ideas of civilisation they acquired from their first teachers. As we have already seen from Alcuin's metrical catalogue of the contents of the library at York, the Church did not include the works of the Roman historians among the subjects which she deemed worthy of study. Dante, profoundly skilled in all the secular and theological knowledge of his time, shows, in his *De Monarchiâ*, that his knowledge of the course of the world is mainly derived from the *Chronicles* of Orosius and Jerome, with such imaginative colouring as might be added from the various interpretations of the prophecy of Daniel. As for Chaucer, a good astronomer according to his lights, a diligent student of the science of the schools, a competent Latin scholar, a master of two modern languages besides his own, the extent of his historical knowledge may be inferred from "The Man of Law's Tale." Here we find an emperor reigning in Rome contemporaneously with a sultan of Syria, upon whom the Emperor bestows the hand of his daughter without the slightest reluctance; while the lady herself, the heroine of many adventures, is afterwards married to Alla, a king of Northumberland, by whom she becomes the mother of Maurice, presumably Emperor of the East, A.D. 582-602!

But though the barbarous nations accepted with reverence the histories of the past which were presented to them on the authority of the Church, they did not refrain from expanding and vivifying the lifeless narrative of the *Chronicles* with their own poetic invention; and this

tendency was much encouraged by the uncritical spirit in which their ecclesiastical teachers examined the nature of the historical evidence on which they relied. Even before the fall of the Empire the intellectual indolence of the times had provided great opportunities for the forger. From the fourth century downwards narratives began to appear professing to be records by eye-witnesses of the most celebrated events in the history of mankind. These were gradually combined by the monastic historians—always disposed to welcome the marvellous—with the bare abstracts of the *Chronicles*.[1] When the northern minstrels and trouvères began to make use of the vulgar tongues as literary instruments, their dramatic fancy wove the decomposed images of the antique world into a new web of thought, embodying their own still barbarous conceptions of nature and society. The result remains in the four great cycles of legend which lie at the base of modern European poetry:—(1) The history of the Trojan War; (2) The history of Alexander; (3) The history of Charlemagne; (4) The history of King Arthur. Nothing can afford a better illustration of the argument of this chapter than the gradual manner in which these histories were composed.

To begin with the Trojan War. In the fourth century a languid excitement was aroused by the report of the appearance of a new and original history. The MS., it was said, had been found in the time of Nero, in the tomb of Dictys of Crete, which had been uncovered by an earthquake. It was written in the Greek language, but in Phœnician characters, and proved to be a narrative of the Trojan War by Dictys the Cretan, the companion of Idomeneus, mentioned in the *Iliad*. This precious document,

[1] Isidore of Seville believed the history of Dares the Phrygian to be perfectly genuine. He says: "Historiam primam apud nos Moyses . . . apud Gentiles vero *primus* Dares Phrygius de Græcis et Trojanis historiam edidit."—Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, i. 42 (Migne, 82, p. 122). The great particularity of Dares seems to have impressed the imagination of his readers. In the Life of Cyriacus in the *Acta Sanctorum*, Helena relies on this as an argument to convince a sceptic that the events of remote antiquity may be accurately reported. See Kemble's Introduction to the *Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis*, Part ii. p. iv.

it seems, having been transcribed into Greek, had been sent to Rome as a present to Nero, and was now translated into Latin by one Septimius. It never rains but it pours. In course of time it appeared that the Trojans too had had their contemporary historian, Dares the Phrygian, who had also left a MS. which had been discovered some hundreds of years before at Athens by Cornelius Nepos. Nepos, for reasons known only to himself, had refrained from publishing this literary curiosity, and contented himself with turning it into Latin. The two literary heroes, and particularly Dares, threw a flood of light on a number of details omitted by Homer. Readers of the *Iliad* were informed of the exact duration of each truce mentioned in it, and might please their imagination with the portraits of four-and-twenty of the chiefs on each side. The descriptions of the women were particularly minute, mention being made of the mole between Helen's eyebrows,[1] and of the colour of Cassandra's hair,[2] while Polyxena, according to the historian, inspired admiration by her long neck, slender fingers, and straight legs.[3] The number of the slain in both armies was accurately recorded, 886,000 having fallen on the side of the Greeks, and 676,000 Trojans.[4] But what appeared most plainly to set the stamp of authenticity on the two narratives was the complete silence of both authors as to the intervention of the gods. The Teutonic poets seized with joy on materials for their art far more rich and various than any preserved in their own cycles of oral tradition. In the reign of Henry II. of England the trouvère Benoît de Ste. More founded on the histories of Dictys and Dares his metrical *Roman de Troye*, and combined with the story the tale of the Theban and Argonautic expeditions, with many improvements of his own. His poem afforded a ground-work for the prose chronicle of Guido delle Colonne, *Historia de Bello Trojano*, which breathed into the narrative the full spirit of chivalry.

[1] "Notam inter duo supercilia habentem."—*De Excidio Trojæ Historia*, c. 12.

[2] "Rufam," *Ibid.* c. 12.

[3] "Collo longo . . . digitis prolixis, cruribus rectis."—*Ibid.* c. 12.

[4] *Ibid.* c. 44.

Guido's History became the basis for another metrical version, *Les cent histoires de Troye en rime*, a composition of the fourteenth century, and this long tidal movement of verse and prose was completed by Caxton's *Recueyl des histoires de Troye*, one of the earliest productions of the English press. Such were the fruits of the forgery whose author is celebrated by Chaucer in the *House of Fame* as bearing up one of the great pillars of history, and as exciting the envy of Homer.[1]

The romance of Alexander rests upon a somewhat different foundation. There was indeed something romantic in the actual history and character of the hero who established the powerful Macedonian Monarchy, and carried the conquests of Greek culture and discipline far back into the primitive Asiatic home of the race. A modern poet might find ample materials for epical treatment in Plutarch's Life of Alexander, or in the serious narrative of Q. Curtius. But not such was the history that pleased the imagination of the Middle Ages. Long after the real significance of Alexander's expedition had faded before the conquering arms of the Romans, a record appeared investing his adventures with all the colours of magic and mythology. To the eye of reason it carried on the surface the hall-mark of forgery. Pretending to be the work of Callisthenes, the contemporary and friend of Alexander, it seemed to offer a still stronger guarantee of authenticity in the shape of letters from Alexander to Aristotle and others. But the entire superstructure raised upon this specious basis of reality was wildly fabulous. The hero himself was represented as being the son of Nectanebus, an enchanter; he visited the scene of the Earthly Paradise; he wrote letters to Indian Brahmins; the adventures in which he engaged

[1] But yet I gan full well espie
Between hem was a litel envie.
One said that Omer made lies,
Feyning in his poetries,
And was to the Greekis favorable,
Therefore held he it but fable.
Chaucer, *House of Fame*, Book iii.

resembled those of the *Arabian Nights*. The date of this composition in Greek is uncertain, but it was translated into Latin by Julius Valerius not later than the fourth century of our era. In its new and grave Latin dress the history seems to have been too long for the readers of that indolent age; it was at any rate soon reduced to an *Epitome*, which long survived as a popular text-book. In the eleventh century Leo, "the archpresbyter," holding a commission from the Dukes of Campania, made a fresh translation of the Greek original, which was more fortunate in catching the public taste. The subject in its "historic" dress was ready-made for the art of the trouvère, and all that remained was to clothe it in a chivalrous garb. This task was soon performed. The first to attempt it was Alberic de Besançon, who, in 1150 A.D., treated the history in the Romance dialect, and in verses of ten syllables. Only 105 lines of his poem survive, and it may be doubted whether he was acquainted with more than the epitome of Julius Valerius' translation. He appears to have been anxious to preserve the knightly ideal in the portrait of Alexander, and indignantly refutes the calumny, founded on the Greek original, that the king was the son of an enchanter. Alberic's successors were less of precisians on this nice point. Lambert le Tort and Alexander of Paris seized with eagerness on all the marvels retailed by the false Callisthenes, and preserved in the translation of Leo, *De Prœliis Alexandri*. The romance of Alexander in their hands swelled into some 30,000 verses of twelve syllables, from which the Alexandrine measure derived its name; and the poets were careful to assign to their Greek hero the virtues that would most commend him to their readers, namely, knight-errantry and liberality in the distribution of fiefs among his followers.[1]

Charlemagne was a figure, historically not less great

[1] A very full and minute account of this cycle of romance and its sources is given in M. Paul Meyer's *Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature française du moyen âge*. Paris, 1886.

and interesting than Alexander, and, like Alexander, he had found a sober and faithful biographer in the person of his secretary, Eginhard. On the other hand, like every famous Teutonic chieftain, he had his *sacer vates*, whose business it was to present an image of his lord in the colossal proportions required by poetry, and whose songs, spreading among the people and receiving improvements from generations of minstrels, acquired, after the manner of Virgil's Rumour, "strength on their journey." In the middle of the twelfth century a monk of the convent of St. James at Compostella in Spain, finding that some of these poetical traditions connected the hero with his own monastery, turned them into prosaic history, for the greater glory of his patron saint. The times were now ready for the appearance of the inevitable forger, and the slender beginnings of the monk of Compostella were soon incorporated in a romantic history, with a preface, professing the work to be the narrative of Turpin, or Tilpin, Archbishop of Rheims, in 745-800 A.D. As this archbishop was a contemporary of Charlemagne, and was reported to have shared in his warlike adventures, the highest authority attached to a record which was, in reality, an ingenious compound of the true history of Charlemagne, many of the actions related of Charles Martel, and the poetical legends which had accumulated round the memory of the emperor and other famous chieftains. The whole history was enlivened by a mixture of angelic and diabolic machinery, capable of gratifying the largest appetite for the marvellous. The Italian poets, who in the sixteenth century took up the legend of Charlemagne, were greatly delighted with the gravity and apparent authenticity of this and other fabulous narratives which grew out of it; and whenever Ariosto seeks to burlesque the mediæval genius with a more than usually extravagant creation of his own fancy, he professes to be transcribing literally from the work of *Turpino*.[1]

[1] The chief authorities on this subject are Gaston Paris, *De Pseudo Turpino*, Paris, 1865; and R. Dozy, *Recherches sur l'histoire de la littérature de l'Espagne pendant le moyen âge*, Paris, 1881.

Charlemagne and Alexander were at least historical figures, but Arthur, who forms the centre of the most splendid and extensive romance of the Middle Ages, was little more than a historical name. Here, too, just as in the two cycles of legend which have been mentioned above, we find a contrast between serious history and fabulous chronicle. Bede and Gildas cover much of the same ground as Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniæ*, and their silence with regard to the wonderful events recorded by the latter has led to the suspicion that Geoffrey evolved his history out of his own imagination. In reality that ingenious writer did no more than put the finishing strokes of style and fancy to a mass of legend which had been long accumulating. The starting point of the Arthurian myth is a history composed by some patriotic Celt of the ninth century, whose object was to represent, in colours favourable to the Britons, the struggle for existence between his countrymen and the Saxon invaders. His narrative contains the germ of Geoffrey's romantic history in an account of the origin of the Britons, the tale of the wonderful child Merlin who prophesied to Vortigern, and the story of the later fortunes of the Britons to the time of Arthur. He observes that various accounts are given of the first ancestor of the race, who, according to one story, was Brutus, a grandson of Æneas, and (strange to say) a Roman consul, and, according to another, Brito, who was of the house and lineage of Japhet. A third genealogy endeavoured to bridge over this inconsistency by taking Brutus as the founder of the line, and connecting him with Noah through the family of Anchises! The historian gives, from Bede and Jerome, but with extraordinary inaccuracy, an account of the occupation of Britain by the Romans, and estimates the interval of time between the composition of his history and the first arrival of the Saxons, and also between the opening of the Christian era and the mission of St. Patrick. Successive copyists of this MS., finding difficulties in the author's chronology, improved the history in the way that each thought best. One of them while

professing to be merely a transcriber, added to the history a prologue, which assigned the authorship to a certain Nennius ; they also inserted a table of chronological calculations (*Calculi*) ; a genealogy of the Saxon kings ; and a chapter of marvels (*Mirabilia*) connected with the general subject.

Such was the foundation on which Geoffrey of Monmouth undoubtedly built his own superstructure. Geoffrey himself speaks of another book written in the British tongue, brought to him, as he says, *out of Britain*, by Walter Calenius, Archdeacon of Oxford, from which he derived many of the materials for his own history. By "Britain" it was long supposed that Geoffrey meant Brittany ; and the mysterious authority in the Celtic language was supposed to be an elaborate fiction. Recent research, however, has proved beyond doubt the existence of a *History of Britain* quite distinct from Nennius' *History of the Britons*, and there appears to be some ground for believing that the "Britannia," from which the Archdeacon of Oxford is said to have brought the book, was merely Wales (*i.e.* the part of England occupied by the Britons). It is possible that this History, containing a collection of legends about the British kings in the Celtic language, suggested to Geoffrey at least the groundwork of the lively fable with which he has surrounded the memory of Arthur. This much is certain that, in striking contrast with the history of Nennius, which represents Arthur as struggling with doubtful success against the Saxon invasion, the *History of Britain* carries him abroad as the conqueror of Gaul.[1] After a feat commemorated on such high authority, it was but a short flight of invention on Geoffrey's part—even if he found no warrant in his original —to the lofty fiction, which makes Arthur overthrow the Roman Emperor in a great battle and assume the imperial crown. From the small beginnings of Nennius, thus expanded into the History of Geoffrey of Monmouth, rose the vast romantic fabric of the History of King Arthur, which finally comprised the Holy Grail, the

[1] See the work referred to in note 1 on the following page.

Story of Merlin, Lancelot du Lac, the Quest of the Holy Grail, the Morte d'Arthur, and the Romance of Tristram.[1]

The reader will not fail to observe in all these instances an evolution of thought closely resembling that by which the Schoolmen transmitted to modern Europe the culture of the pagan world. As in the sphere of science the Church converted the seven liberal arts to the service of theology, so in the sphere of history the fancy of the barbarians is seen digesting and reconstructing the decomposed matter of ancient civilisation. Strangely varied is the intellectual drama by which the work of transmutation is effected—the *ennui* of Greek and Roman, who have lost all interest in the glorious records of their past liberty; the Christian zeal, which seeks to obliterate these records in favour of the scriptural account of the history of mankind; the child-like curiosity of the Gothic tribesman, speculating on the nature of an unknown past. The joint product of these co-operating forces is a Mythology, presenting a new conception of man and nature, but embodying at the same time detached images of ancient history and religion, distinct as the indications of primeval foliage preserved in the depths of the coal-mine.

IV. Turning from mythology to poetry, from the matter of art to its form and spirit, we find ourselves still in the presence of a great but gradual movement of conversion. The continuity of life, in the sphere of thought and language, between the decay of the Roman Empire and the rise of mediæval Europe, is demonstrable; but the process of transformation is of that secret kind, which can be followed only by a sustained effort of reason and imagination. For, at first sight, there appears to be an unbridged gulf between the earliest examples of European poetry and the surviving monuments of Latin poetry, on the one hand, and of Teutonic minstrelsy, on the other. If we look at the spirit pervading the work of the later Latin poets like Prudentius, Sedulius, and Prosper, we

[1] A careful study of the sources of Geoffrey's History is made in *L'Historia Britonum attribuée à Nennius*. By M. Arthur De La Borderie. Paris, London, 1883.

find that it retains, in a feeble measure, an air of civil refinement inherited from the traditions of Virgil. In a poem like *Beowulf*, on the contrary, the product of oral minstrelsy, there still breathes the temper of the tribesman, rejoicing in the freedom of the steppe, the forest, and the mountain. Both in manner are as unlike as possible the poetry of the troubadours and of Dante. If again we look at these various examples of the art of poetry on their technical side, we find that they are all constructed on distinct and opposite metrical principles; the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, for instance, being based on the principle of quantity, *Beowulf* on the principle of alliteration, and the *Divine Comedy* on the principle of accent, syllabic measurement, and rhyme.

When, however, we examine the matter a little closer, we observe that between the author of the *Song of Beowulf* and the troubadours there is at least one link of connection, namely, that both parties make use of the same instrument, minstrelsy; while Dante is in touch with the Latin Christian poets, in respect of his subject and of a scholastic training, inherited, as has been already shown, from the Roman Empire. Moreover, strange as it seems, it can be proved that, while the alliterative measure, which regulated the minstrelsy of the barbarians, sank gradually into disuse after the Teutonic races came into contact with Latin civilisation, some of the Latin metres, based entirely on the principle of quantity, were transmuted, by simple decomposition, into metres still used in European poetry, and dependent on accent, syllabic measurement, and rhyme. Thus the path of development lies, in one direction, through the conversion of the Teutonic scop into the French trouvère and troubadour; in another, through the change of Latin into the Romance languages and metres; while this inward process is still further modified by the influence of feudal institutions, scholastic logic, and Oriental culture.

Unmistakable traces of the main transformation have been left on the surface of language. When the spirit of minstrelsy begins to pass into a literary form, the genius

of the *Scop* (maker), dominated by Latin associations, barely disguises itself under such names as *Trouvère* and *Troubadour* (Trovator); the *Gleeman* becomes the *Jongleur* (joculator); while the simple Teutonic *lied* or lay branches into such various kinds of epic composition as the *dit* (dicere), the *fabliau* (fabula), the *roman* (romanus), and such lyrical varieties, as the *ballad* (balla), the *sonnet* (sonare), the *chanson* or *canzone* (canere).

Teutonic, as well as Celtic, poetry is, in its origin, an embodiment of the imagination of the Tribe, not of the State; and even after the conversion of the Germans to Christianity and their experience of Roman civilisation, it retained much of its primitive character. Though the art of minstrelsy was known at a very early period to the Aryan races, yet among the pastoral peoples, at any rate, it must have remained for generations, probably for centuries, without capacity for development. When the westward exodus began the life of these peoples would have been entirely nomadic; and, even at the semi-agricultural stage they have reached in the descriptions of Cæsar and Tacitus, they are still without cities. Societies of this kind may, within a limited range, cultivate epic and lyrical poetry, but they do not feel the need of the drama, and philosophical conceptions of nature are of course beyond their reach. Age after age of poets repeats the stories by which the tribe accounts for the order of all things in earth and heaven; traces the descent of its chieftains from the gods; praises the valour of its victorious leaders; laments over its heroes fallen in battle; and satirises the character of those who have shown themselves backward in war. There is nothing to change the current of ideas, and the art of the individual poet can only be shown by devising variations of the primeval type.

But when the barbarians became the masters of the Roman Empire, this old equipment of thought was at once felt to be inadequate to their needs. In the first place, the tide of migration ceased, and provision had to be made for the various necessities of settled government.

The conquerors for the first time became acquainted with the life of cities, which, however degraded might be the spirit of the inhabitants, still preserved the monuments of ancient splendour and refinement. As nation after nation was converted to Christianity, it looked up with reverence to men who, though speaking the language of a conquered race, were the apostles of a victorious religion. In the Latin language, too, the barbarians found a treasure house of literature, art, and philosophy, which seemed to open out a boundless prospect to their fresh and ardent imaginations.

There is, of course, no positive evidence to show when the character of barbarian minstrelsy began to change, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the art would have received a fresh development from the influences that met and mingled in the genius of Charlemagne. The biographer of that great conqueror depicts him at one time as the successor of the Cæsars and the protector of the Latin Church, listening in person to suits in the law-courts, or attending to the instructions of Alcuin; at another time as the German tribesman interested in the preservation of the oral traditions of Frankish poetry.[1] It was fitting that a hero of this kind should live as the last great figure of Teutonic epic song. Under his feeble descendants his empire gradually broke up into numerous divisions, themselves constantly subdivided: the principality, the duchy, the county, once held as a *beneficium* from the monarch, became the legal inheritance of the vassal; the allod changed into the fief; the martial *comitatus* settled down into the local court; and the customs of the people, while remaining barbarous, were no longer nomadic. The Frankish scop must, under these altered circumstances, have been deprived of many of the primitive motives of song. His very language was lost in the speech of the race he had conquered. His mythical traditions were distasteful to the Church of which he had become a member. He could no longer celebrate the leaders of great tribal armies for

[1] Eginhardus, *Vita et Gesta Caroli Magni*, c. 25, 29.

ever on the march, but sank into the mere dependant of a lord, whose *ennui*, increasing as his powers of motion were circumscribed, required to be relieved by every variety of entertainment. To satisfy the pettier but more exacting tastes of his audience, the lofty bard by degrees stooped to eke out his minstrelsy with the tricks of inferior professions, and to amuse the inhabitants of the castle with all those varieties of juggling, jesting, and pantomime, which came to be associated with the art of the *joculator* or *jongleur*.[1]

This decline in the spirit of minstrelsy led to a great variety of style in metrical composition. Some of the primeval motives survived in a degenerate form. The vanity of the prince or duke still sought gratification in tracing his descent to some hero of tradition, particularly Charlemagne and his *comitatus;* hence the oldest form of mediæval European poetry is the *Chanson de Geste*, an example of which survives in the *Chant de Roland*, which the minstrel Taillefer is said to have sung in the Norman ranks at the battle of Hastings.[2] These poems are invariably composed in verses of five accents and ten syllables, and were doubtless accompanied by the harp or viol of the singer. In later days the oral *Chant* expanded into the literary *Roman*. As the gleeman had been transformed into the *jongleur*, so out of the latter was developed a new species, the *trouvère* or inventor, whose genius, stimulated by the Crusades, revived something of the ancient tribal nomadic spirit, and the taste for legendary marvel. The *Roman*, originally employed, like the *Chanson de Geste*, as an historical instrument for preserving the memory of national heroes (a specimen is still extant in the *Roman de Rou*), was gradually changed by the *trouvère* into the

[1] A fuller account of the gradual decay of the minstrel's profession, and of the transformation of oral into written poetry, is given in Chapter XI.

[2] Taillefer qui moult bien chantoit
Sor un cheval qui tost aloit,
Devant le duc aloit chantant
De Karlemaigne et de Rollant,
Et d'Oliver et des vassals
Qi morurent en Rencevals.
Wace, *Roman de Rou*, 8035.

literary vehicle for those gigantic legendary fictions in verse or prose about Charlemagne, Arthur, and Alexander, the genesis of which has been already described.

At the same time, as the Romance languages began to be written as well as spoken, a taste for shorter compositions rapidly spread, and the *jongleur* or *trouvère* found his account in composing, in a more polished style, short tales variously classified as *lai*, *dit*, or *fabliau*. The different names of these poems do not always denote a settled distinction in their matter, for though the *lai*, as the Celtic and Teutonic affinities of the word suggest, usually embodies some wild conception of folk lore, yet it sometimes covers the same ground as the *fabliau*; while the *dit* is the description given to almost any kind of short story. A more specific meaning generally attaches to the name *fabliau*, a form of poem used, as a rule, for the preservation of those popular tales, which from time immemorial had circulated among nations of Indo-European descent, and of which the *Milesian Tales*, so agreeable to the taste of the Greeks and Romans, were doubtless prototypes. The *fabliaux* were for the most part narratives of comic adventures and clever tricks, practised especially by women; or scandalous anecdotes, in which the chief actors in mediæval times were monks and priests. Little skill was required to reproduce these venerable, but always welcome stories, in a metrical form, and the appropriation of the *fabliau* by the *trouvère* marked the final stage in the decline of minstrelsy. Petrarch, who tells us that *jongleurs* occasionally came to ask him for poetical assistance, says of them: "You will find in them more of memory than invention, and more effrontery than memory. As they live at the expense of others, they learn by heart verses in the vulgar tongue, and repeat them with much gesticulation before the rich and noble, from whom they receive in return money, clothes, and presents." [1] The *fabliau* is, in fact, the offspring of the primitive genius of the tribesmen brought into contact with city life; it is the germ from which in future will be developed many of the most famous produc-

[1] Petrarch, *Epist. Senil.* v. 3.

tions of European fiction: the *Decameron*, the *Canterbury Tales*, the most characteristic portions of the *Orlando Furioso*, *Don Quixote*, the plays of Molière, the fables of La Fontaine, the novels of Smollett.

While on its epic side the art of oral minstrelsy thus degenerated, a new impulse was given to it on the lyrical side by the growth of feudalism. The troubadour was as plainly the poet of the feudal aristocracy, as the *jongleur*, with his *fabliau*, was the poet of the bourgeois of the city. During the decentralising period after the death of Charlemagne, each local independent court formed an isolated society in the midst of a subject population, and the code of manners in this *comitatus* was founded on some of the primitive instincts of the German tribe, one of which was the peculiar honour paid to women. Within the walls of the fortified castle the influence of woman soon became paramount, and, associating itself with the usages of chivalry and the adoration of the Virgin, framed for the Teutonic aristocracy a network of unwritten laws to regulate the intercourse of the sexes. Out of this condition of things arose the famous institution of the Courts of Love, as to the effects of which on the course of mediæval poetry much will have to be said hereafter. For the present it is sufficient to observe that the art of the troubadours, generated as it was in an esoteric atmosphere, never rooted itself in the popular soil; the poetical dialect it employed was addressed to the taste of the "précieuses" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and the methods of interpretation, which must be applied to the language and manners of the Hôtel Rambouillet, are also applicable—due allowance being made for different stages of civilisation—to the judgments on love and poetry pronounced in the castle of the Countess of Champagne.

The poetry of the troubadours did not arrest the decline of minstrelsy, but brought it into alliance with scholastic literature. On the one hand the comparatively settled condition and growing refinement of society deprived the scop of many of his ancient themes; on the other, the Teutonic intellect, coming under the influence

of an old civilisation, began to aim at new artistic ideals. The infant literature of every existing European nation which contains a Latin element reflects vividly the genius of the schools. Sometimes the effect of the encyclopædic training of the time shows itself in the inordinate passion of the poet for displaying his learning, at the expense of taste and judgment. If Chaucer has occasion to mention a forest, he does not rest till he has enumerated all the different kinds of trees that grew in it, and the various purposes for which they were used.[1] In his *House of Fame* he tells us that the temple of Venus, in which he happened to find himself, was ornamented with paintings representing scenes in the life of Æneas, but instead of resting content—like Virgil when describing the pictures in Carthage—with two or three vivid touches, he gives an abstract of the *Æneid* up to the death of Dido.[2] John de Meung, having introduced into the *Romaunt of the Rose* an invective against Love, diverges into the praises of old age, merely for the purpose of showing his readers that he is acquainted with all that Cicero says on the subject in his treatise *De Senectute*.[3]

A still more characteristic feature of mediæval poetry is its reproduction of the scholastic logic. For a long period, as has been already remarked, the Latin Church looked with suspicion on Logic as a profane art, which aspired to intrude presumptuously into regions reserved for the privileged eye of Faith. Even when Scotus Erigena employed dialectic as a weapon against the heterodoxy of Gotschalk, his intervention was regarded with alarm, almost with abhorrence; and it was not till the great dispute arose on the nature of Universals, that the Church perceived the necessity of defending her dogmas with systematic reasoning. From that time forward logic became the most important of all the seven sciences in the academical course, and the work of confirming faith by the methods of reason was carried on till it reached its highest perfection in the hands of St. Thomas Aquinas.

[1] See *Parlement of Foules*, 183. [2] *House of Fame*, Book i. 140-467.
[3] See *Roman de la Rose*, v. 4444.

This spirit, naturally communicating itself to those who practised the arts of rhetoric and poetry, gave birth to new forms of metrical composition. Throughout the thirteenth century numerous poems were produced, imitating the form of the scholastic debate, in which two opposing reasoners advanced arguments on each side of a question, and contended till the dispute was determined by a logical conclusion. Among others the following subjects are discussed: "De la Disputacyon de la Sinagogue et de la Sainte Eglise"; "Debat entre un Juif et un Chrétien"; "Marguet" (being a debate between a young woman and an old man); "Bataille d'Enfer et de Paradis."[1] Logic invaded even the poetry of the troubadours and the Courts of Love, where abstruse and subtle questions of the greatest delicacy were argued in the most precise syllogistic form. One class of Provençal poetry derived its name from this fashion. "In the gallant manners of chivalry," says Raynouard, "and in the intellectual entertainments of the troubadours, distinction was obtained by a talent for maintaining and defending delicate and controverted questions, usually relating to love; the work in which the poets thus displayed the refinement and subtlety of their wit was called *Tenson* from the Latin *contentionem, dispute, debat;* we read in the Count of Poitiers: "And if you propose to me a game of love, I am not such a fool as not to choose the better side of the argument."[2]

The most splendid fruits of the scholastic education are seen in the writings of Dante. Of the effects of the schools on his prose style it is superfluous to speak. Whether he is expounding the divine origin of monarchy, or explaining the form of his sonnets, his logical training shows itself in the connected chain of proofs by which he reaches every conclusion. But the same spirit is no less visible in his poetry. In the whole system of thought out of which the *Divine Comedy* is composed, in the choice of the words, in the structure of the sentences, even in the severe harmony of the cadences, we feel the work of a

[1] *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xxiii. pp. 216-234.
[2] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. ii. p. 84.

vast genius formed by the training of the Schoolmen. At one time Beatrice in the third heaven resolves the doubts of her pupil on some theological difficulty;[1] at another she furnishes him with a demonstration that the Church cannot dispense from the observation of monastic vows.[2] Saint Thomas Aquinas impresses on his mind the absolute necessity of logical methods in matters of faith. "And let this always be to thee as lead to thy feet to make thee move slowly, like a weary man, both to the 'yes' and the 'no' that thou dost not see; since low indeed is he among the fools who without distinction affirms and denies, alike in the one and the other pass; since he meets that which many times turns current opinions to the false side, and afterwards prejudice binds the intellect. Much more than in vain he quits the shore, since he does not return the same man as he set out, who fishes for the truth but has no skill."[3]

Chaucer, though he is of course far removed from Dante in subtlety of reasoning, furnishes a no less striking example of the influence exercised on poetry by the dialectical training of the schools. Writing in the spirit of a trouvère, he nevertheless delights to animate his stories with passages of debate. His pilgrims are as quarrelsome and argumentative as doctors of the university; his animals chop logic with each other and cite Plato and Aristotle; even his women abstain from exerting the privilege of their sex, and jumping to a conclusion. His poetical disputations imitate most faithfully the procedure of the schools. First the thesis is proposed; then comes

[1] Dante, *Paradiso*, vii. 52-148. [2] *Ibid.* v. 1-84.

[3] E questo ti sia sempre piombo ai piedi,
Per farti muover lento, com' uom lasso,
Ed al sì ed al nò che tu non vedi:
Chè quegli è tra gli stolti ben abbasso,
Che senza distinzion afferma e nega,
Così nell' un, come nell' altro passo:
Perch' egl' incontra che più volte piega
L' opinion corrente in falsa parte,
E poi l' affetto lo intelletto lega.
Vie più che indarno da riva si parte,
Perchè non torna tal qual' ei si muove,
Chi pesca per lo vero e non ha l' arte.

*Ibid.* xiii. 112.

the appeal to authorities, and an enormous array of learning is advanced for and against the proposition. "Auctoritie" is a word of frequent occurrence in the *Canterbury Tales.* Thus says the Wife of Bath :—

> Experience, though non authoritie
> Were in this world, is right ynough for me
> To speke of wo that is in marriage.

And in the same way the loathly Bride, in the Wife of Bath's Tale—

> Now, sire, of elde that ye repreven me,
> And, certes, sire, though non authoritie
> Were in no book, ye gentiles of honour
> Sain that men should an olde wight honour,
> And clepe him fader for your gentillesse ;
> And auctors shall I finden as I gesse.

But it is not enough to cite authority ; the argument itself must be marshalled with skill and precision ; and a conclusion must be arrived at from premises correctly stated even in the midst of the most agitating circumstances. An admirable illustration of this love of formal logic is afforded by the tale from which the last extract is taken. A knight of King Arthur's court, being condemned to death, is reprieved at the intercession of the queen, on condition that he solves a riddle she proposes to him within a year. An old woman furnishes him with the answer, but exacts from him in return a promise that he will grant her any request she may make of him. When the time comes she demands that he shall marry her, and the knight abides by his word ; but as she proceeds to claim all the privileges of a wife he betrays great distress. His wife asks him the reason, and he replies with more frankness than gallantry :—

> Thou art so lothly and so old also,
> And thereto comen of so low a kinde,
> That litel wonder is though I walwe and wind :
> So wolde God min herte wolde brest.

Thereupon—

"Is this," quod she, "the cause of your unrest?"
"Ye certainly," quod he, "no wonder is."
"Now, sire," quod she, "I coude amend all this."

But first she takes his proposition point by point, proving, in the first place, from the reasoning of Dante and the example of Tullus Hostilius [Servius Tullius], that lowness of birth is no bar to real nobility; in the second place, from Seneca and Juvenal, that poverty is not an evil; and in the third place, that there are certain advantages even in having an old and ugly wife. It must be admitted that the lady appears to have had some doubts of the efficacy of her logic, for at the close of her sermon she turns herself with great promptitude into a young and beautiful woman who has no difficulty in effecting the knight's conversion.

The evidence that has been presented tends to show that the motive power of Christian European poetry springs from the oral minstrelsy of the Teutonic and Scandinavian tribes; and that the framework or setting of imagination, derived from the institutions, customs, and tastes of the audience, is also Germanic. On the other hand, the spirit of oral minstrelsy is found to have been profoundly modified by contact with Latin civilisation; its old character is transformed by the new themes it borrows from Greek mythology and history, from Hindoo fable, and ecclesiastical legend; while the transition from oral to literary composition exhibits plainly the influence of the training of the Church. It still remains to inquire into the origin of the metrical forms and literary models adopted by the early poets of France and Italy, who gave the first examples of composition to the fathers of English verse. This will lead us to observe a most remarkable process of rhythmical transformation, effected by the forces partly of natural decay, partly of artistic reconstruction. We shall see how the artificial structure of classic Latin verse was undermined by an irresistible power inherent in the Latin language itself; how the ruins of the classic system were rendered available for use in the Romance languages; and how fresh metrical forms and moulds were

created for these languages by the imitation of models derived from the Arabs.

The first principles of Latin classic prosody were imported from Greece, and were naturalised by a succession of great Latin poets, almost in spite of the inherent tendencies of their own language. Hence all the established Latin, like all the Greek, metres were determined by the principle of quantity, which checked for a time the native energy of the Latin accent.[1] The quantity of syllables and the fall of the accent in the Greek language were both regulated by a scientific musical principle, the exact nature of which it is now impossible to discover. But in Latin the tonic accent, or stress of the voice, fell always on that part of the word which contained the stem, and its particular place was determined by the quantity of the penultimate syllable of the whole word. The accent, therefore, was a far more powerful factor in Latin prosody than in Greek, and constantly endangered the stability of the artificial metrical structure introduced by Ennius, which depended on the nice perception of the quantitative value of each individual syllable. Moreover, the musical ear of the Romans was not nearly so refined as that of the Greeks, and their consequent tendency to confuse distinctions of sound is shown in their early literature by the frequency with which words are contracted by the omission of syllables, or by the change of full-sounding into attenuated vowels. Thus in Plautus we often find, instead of the full forms *evasisti*, *dixisti*, *scripsistis*, *admisisse*, *advexisse*, the contractions *evasti*, *dixti*, *scripstis*, *admisse*, *advexe;* the vowel is absorbed in the middle of a word, as in *audacter*, *valde*, *imus*, the full form of which is *audaciter*, *valide*, *infimus;* in words derived from the Greek the open *a* is replaced by *e*, as in *camera*, *phaleræ*, *tessera*, *siserum*, derived from

[1] For the sake of the reader who is not acquainted with Latin and Greek, it may be advisable to say that in these languages every syllable was regarded as "short" (∪) or "long" (–); that one long syllable was equal to two short ones; that Latin and Greek metres were constructed by combination of different kinds of "feet" (*i.e.* a certain number of syllables of different quantity); and that the principal kinds of feet were the *dactyl* (– ∪∪), the *anapæst* (∪∪ –), the *spondee* (– –), the *iambus* (∪ –), and the *trochee* (– ∪).

καμάρα, φαλάρα, τέσσαρα, σίσαρον; and even in native Latin the full *u* is contracted into *i*, as in *optimus*, *manibus*, *maximus*, instead of the older *optumus*, *manubus*, *maxumus*, The general result was, that while the Romans were quick to catch the rhythm and cadence of a metrical movement, in so far as it was determined by the even distribution of the accent, they had much difficulty in understanding the rules of quantity, and though the great Latin poets of the Golden Age showed the most admirable skill in naturalising Greek metres, and in accommodating the language to the requirements of Greek prosody, yet, in the days of decline, their scientific principles were more and more neglected.

Of the metres imported from Greek literature those which established themselves most firmly in the Latin language were the hexameter, the iambic trimeter, and the trochaic tetrameter. The use of the hexameter, depending as it did on the combination of feet unequal in the number of their syllables, and therefore presenting difficulties in respect of quantity, was entirely confined to men of letters and education. On the other hand, the metres composed exclusively of iambuses and trochees, with a simple rhythmical movement, readily commended themselves to the ear of the people. The iambic metres were familiar to the audiences in the theatre; the more nimbly moving trochaic became a favourite in military and popular chants. In all alike, whether they were employed by the scholar or the crowd, the same tendency to disregard the laws of quantity is increasingly visible with the advance of time. It is easy to understand that artificial distinctions as to the natural quantity of simple vowels should soon have disappeared, and we need not be surprised to find a man of education like Prudentius introducing *Măthĕsĭs*[1] (μάθησις) into his verse as a word with the middle syllable short. But it is a conclusive proof of the power of the accent in determining Latin prosody that a scientific grammarian like Diomedes, writing in the fourth century after Christ,

[1] Prudentius, *Adversus Symmachum*, 2. 893 :—

Involvit mathesi, magicas impellit in artes.

should have come to regard the word *armatus* as an amphibrach, that is to say, a long central syllable, flanked by two short ones (⏑–⏑).[1] For of course in the Golden Age the first *a* of this word would have been recognised as long by its position before two consonants. Curiously enough, Diomedes himself admits this vowel to be long in the word *ārmă*, not, however, simply on account of its position, but because of the rule of the Latin language that the *accent* must necessarily be thrown back as far as the penultimate syllable. In the word *armatus* the tonic accent falls on the penultimate syllable because it is long by nature ; hence, according to Diomedes, the voice passes rapidly over the first syllable, even though the vowel is followed by two consonants.

Now when the native power of the accent was making itself so irresistibly felt in scientific criticism and polite composition, it is easy to understand that, in popular verses made solely to meet the requirements of the ear, the laws of quantity would soon come to be completely disregarded. In the hymns composed by the early Christian fathers for use in churches we know that this was done deliberately, in order, as St. Augustine says, that they might not be driven by the necessities of metre to use words which were unfamiliar to the people.[2] Thus in the Hymn of St. Ambrose, cited by Bede, the metre employed is rightly described by the latter as being *like* the iambic (*ad instar iambici metrici*):

1

Ō Rēx, | ǣtēr|nĕ Dŏ|mĭnĕ,|
Rērūm | crĕāt|ŏr ōmn|ĭŭm,|
Quī ĕr|ās ān|tĕ sǣc|ŭlă,|
Sēmpēr | cūm pā|trĕ fīl|ĭŭs,|

2

Quī mūn|dī īn | prīmōr|dĭō|
Ădām | plāsmās|tī hŏm|ĭnĕm,|
Cŭī | tŭǣ | ĭmāg|ĭnī|
Vūltūm | dĕdīs|tī sĭm|ĭlĕm.|[3]

[1] Diomedes, *Ars Gram.* lib. ii. 470, 428 (Keil I.). Benlæw, *Précis d'une Théorie des Rhythmes*, Première Partie, p. 61.

[2] "Ne me necessitas metrica ad aliqua verba quæ vulgo minus sunt usitata compelleret."—S. Aug. *Retract.* lib. i. 20. Migne, 32, p. 617.

[3] Beda Venerabilis, *De Metricâ Ratione.* Migne, 90, p. 174.

Or to take an example of the popular use of the trochaic movement, we have the boys' chant in honour of Aurelian:[1]

Ūnŭs | hŏmō | mīllĕ | mīllĕ | mīllĕ | dēcōl|lāvĭ|mŭs|
Tāntūm | vīnī | hăbēt | nēmŏ | qūantūm | fūdīt | sāngŭin|is.|

Here we have an ordinary trochaic tetrameter, with the exception that the different feet are not always strictly speaking trochees. To adapt this metre to the requirements of rhyme, when men once began to notice the capacities inherent in that metrical instrument, was a simple matter, as may be seen from the fact that, if the first two verses of the *Dies Iræ* be written in a single line, and the last syllable omitted, we have a trochaic tetrameter quite as regular as those just cited :—

Dies | iræ, | dies | illa, | solvet | sæclum | in fa|vill|a|.

This is of course precisely the same as the metre of *Locksley Hall*—

Comrades, | leave me | here a | little, | while as | yet 'tis | early | morn.|

In the same way we may trace the lineage of the Italian hendecasyllabic and the French and English decasyllabic heroic metres in unbroken descent from the iambic trimeter, commonly used among the Romans on the stage and in popular songs, such as that sung by the garrison of Modena in the tenth century :[2]—

O tu qui servas armis ista mœnia,
Noli dormire, moneo, sed vigila,
Dum Hector vigil exstitit in Troia,
Non eam cepit fraudulenta Græcia.

Compare this with the following lines from Sannazaro, and the Latin and Italian metres will be found to be fundamentally the same :—

Solca nell' onde e nell' arene semine,
E tenta i vaghi venti in rete accogliere,
Chi fonda sua speranza in cor di femine.[3]

[1] "Adeo ut etiam ballistea pueri et saltatiunculas in Aurelianum tales componerent, quibus diebus festis militariter saltitarent."—*Flavii Vopisci Aurelianus*, c. vi.

[2] Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicæ*, iii. 709.

[3] Benlæw, *Précis d'une Théorie des Rhythmes*, Première Partie, p. 71.

The number of rhymes in Italian technically called *sdruccioli* or "sliding" (that is to say, in which the tonic accent falls on the antepenultimate syllable, and all three of the rhyming syllables correspond in sound) is limited. Hence when rhyme came to be accepted as an essential principle of constructive harmony in the Romance languages, the last foot of the trimeter iambic naturally disappeared, and the Italian iambic verse was restricted to eleven syllables; while, for an analogous reason, the French verse of five accents, with the English metre which was imitated from it, had no more than ten. As to the octosyllabic metre, it is easy to see that it is the offspring of the iambic dimeter (like the Hymn of St. Ambrose), which it resembles both in the fall of the accent and the number of syllables, the differences between the two metres being caused by the introduction into the octosyllabic metre of the *cæsura* or pause and the rhyming close :—

The wáy was lóng, || the wínd was cóld,
The mínstrel || wăs infírm and óld.[1]

The sum of what has been said as to the history of modern European metres is, that many of the Greek metres were imported into the Latin language by the literary Roman poets; that some of them were afterwards modified, by the disregard of quantity, to suit the requirements of the popular ear; and that, still later, by some obvious retrenchments, they were accommodated to the changed character of the Romance languages which grew up out of the rustic Latin. The history of the rise of the new system of rhyming architecture on these old foundations cannot be traced with the same certainty, but is not beyond the reach of reasonable conjecture. When the Latin and the barbarian elements were fused in the Romance languages, the metrical system of these tongues was without the principle of rhythmical limitation, since on the one side quantity had disappeared, while alliteration, the basis of the barbarian minstrelsy, had fallen into disuse,

[1] It will be observed that the effect of the *cæsura* after the third syllable in the second line is to lighten the stress of the accent on the following syllable. This modification of the iambic movement is very frequent in English verse.

as the structure of the Frankish tongue gradually gave way before the powerful solvent of Latin culture. In all, therefore, that relates to what may be called the rhetoric of verse, in other words, to the marking of emphasis and the defining of periods, there was a sensible void. This the poets of the new languages supplied, by restricting each line to an equal number of syllables as well as of accents, and limiting each metrical period by the unity of rhyme. Their models of harmony were in all probability derived from the Arabs, who, after carrying their conquests into Syria and Persia, had invaded Spain and established a western court at Cordova, whence they threatened the kingdoms of Europe. Bearing in many respects a striking likeness to the great German tribe, especially in their chivalrous manners and their respect for women, the Arabs were far in advance of the Franks in refinement. Communications between the two races were frequent, and when Charlemagne exchanged courtesies with Haroun-er-Rasheed he was probably not ignorant of the nature of Arab poetry. This much is certain, that in the earliest known metrical composition in the Romance language, the *Poem on Boethius*, the verses are measured by five accents falling at regular intervals within ten syllables, and are bound together into a strophe, by means of a single assonant rhyme recurring at each final syllable. Similar features are found in the *Chant de Roland* and other *Chansons de Geste*, the earliest productions of French vernacular poetry ; and almost all of them, namely the strophe itself, the limitation of the strophe by the single rhyme, and the measurement of the verse by the number of syllables, appear centuries before in the *Kaside* or heroic love poem of the Arabs. The only difference is, that where the French verse is measured by the regular beat of the accent, the Arab verse is determined by the recurrence of quantitative feet.

The evidence pointing to the Arab origin of Italian rhyme architecture is more positive and direct. When we remember the long occupation of Sicily by the Saracens, and the widespread influence of the court of Frederic II., crowded as it was with Arab philosophers and poets, the testimony

of Dante, speaking of the different species of Italian poetry, becomes highly significant. "First let us examine," says he, "the genius of the Sicilian dialect, for it seems to claim a pre-eminence over the others, both because all the poems written by Italians are called Sicilian, and also because many Sicilian writers have composed important poems."[1] If Italian poems were called Sicilian, it was doubtless because the examples of the art were derived from Sicily, in other words from the Arabs. And this presumption is rendered stronger by the names of the various kinds of poetry, *canzone*, *sonnet*, *ballad*, which Dante defines, and which all of them join with the metrical composition an accompaniment of singing, music, dancing, or all three combined. "We must, lastly, make mention," says Amari in his *History of the Mussulmans of Sicily*, "of the musicians who were accustomed to sing to the lute the verses of the poets; a usage which the Arabs learned from the Persians, and which was condemned and, wherever it was possible, forbidden by the strict Mussulmans, though the rich and the great often collected troops of musicians for singing and dancing."[2] Again, as the old-fashioned Arab *Kaside*, with its strophe of verses connected by a single rhyme, seems to have furnished the model for the *Chanson de Geste*, so the metrical germ of the *canzone* and sonnet is found in the *Mowascehât* or *Azgiâl*, a composition made up of verses in stanzas with corresponding rhymes recurring at fixed intervals. The following specimen of the *mowascehât* is cited by Amari:—

1

Wa ghazalin muscianneſi
Kad retha li ba'da bu'di
Lamma rea ma lakeitu

2

Mithiu raudhin mufawweſi
La obâli wahwa 'indi
Fi hubbihi ids dhaneitu.

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book i. cap. 12. Muratori (*Antiq. Ital.* 705) on the whole inclines to the view here adopted.

[2] Translated from Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. ii. p. 544. Compare with this Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book ii. c. 12.

Compare with this the two following "feet," as Dante calls them, of the Ode, in the *canzone* beginning—

1

Amor, che nella mente mi ragiona
Della mia donna disiosamente,
Move cose di lei meco sovente
Che l' intelletto sovr' esse disvia.

2

Lo suo parlar si dolcemente sona
Che l' anima ch' ascolta e che lo sente
Dice "o me lassa!" ch' io non son possente
Di dir quel ch' odo della donna mia.[1]

So close a resemblance of metrical structure can scarcely have been the result of accident, and taking into account the popularity of the *mowascehât* among the Arabs, it is a fair conclusion that it first suggested to the poets of Sicily and South Italy the idea of metres with interlacing rhymes. "The *mowascehât*," says Amari, "were introduced first at the court of Cordova at the end of the ninth century; they were much in vogue in Africa and Spain from the eleventh century, and this western fashion found favour even in Egypt and Syria, and still survives. Whether it was a germ hidden in the national poetry of the Arabs, a novelty borrowed from Persia, or a mere imitation of the strophes and rhymes of low Latinity, which circulated perhaps among the clergy and people of Spain at the time of the conquest, the characteristics of the *mowascehât* are in every way lighter than those of the classic Arab poetry; the long verses divided by hemistiches; the single rhyme of longer compositions; the old-fashioned or obsolete words introduced for the sake of the rhyme or exuberance of diction; and, in the *Kaside*, the machinery of the lover visiting the spots deserted by his mistress," etc. etc.[2]

These last words seem to indicate the origin, not merely of the Italian and Provençal metres, but even of the poetical conventions observed by Petrarch and the troubadours. Petrarch, we know, was acquainted

[1] Dante, *Il Canzoniere*, Parte Seconda, canzone vii.
[2] Translated from Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. iii. p. 740

with Arab poetry. Writing to a friend, he says, "What the Arab physicians are like, you know; but what their poets are like, I know; there is nothing more effeminate, more nerveless, more obscene." [1] Renan seems to doubt whether Petrarch had really read the poems he speaks of,[2] but it does not appear to be wonderful that the compositions of poets so much favoured by Frederic II. should have been known to their European neighbours, either in the original or in translations. Nor again is it unnatural that Petrarch, hating the Mussulmans as infidels, and imbued with the manly spirit of classic Latin poetry, should have looked with disdain on the softness, suppleness, and sensuous passion of the Arab *canzone*. But poets are often not too proud to borrow from what they affect to despise; and the many resemblances between Petrarch's sonnets and such a poem, for example, as the *Divan* of Ibn-Faridh (died 1230 A.D.), —the exaltation of the beloved mistress, the complaints of the absent lover, the constant analysis of amorous moods of feeling, the extravagance of metaphorical diction—make it almost incredible that the two classes of poetry should have sprung from two completely distinct sources of inspiration.

I have attempted to bridge over in various directions the gulf that seems to separate the civilisation of the ancient world from the thought and imagination of the community of Europe in the Middle Ages, at the time when the rising nations were beginning to make use of the vulgar tongues for the purposes of poetical composition. We must now, in accordance with the plan that has been proposed, travel into a different quarter, and trace the course of fusion between the elements that compose the English language, from the days when it was the isolated instrument of Anglo-Saxon thought, to the period when Chaucer made it into a vehicle for expressing the general interests and sentiments of the European system.

[1] Petrarch, *Opera Senilia*, lib. xii. ep. 2.

[2] "Comment Pétrarque a-t-il pu connaître la poésie arabe dont le moyen âge n'a pas eu la moindre notion?"—*Averroes*, p. 330, note 1.

## CHAPTER III

### THE POETRY OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS

Of the three elements of race that are found in the constitution of the English language—Celtic, Teutonic, and Latin—the most vital and powerful is the Teutonic. The Celtic influence on our tongue has been something quite inappreciable. Unlike their Gallic kinsmen when invaded by the Franks, the Britons had only acquired from their Roman masters a superficial tinge of civil culture. The war waged against them by the Saxons was one of extermination, so that, when pushed back by their enemies into the Cornish peninsula and the mountains of Wales, they disappeared, leaving scarcely a trace of their occupation of central Britain. Beyond the names of places in Cornwall and Wales, and words like "bard," indicating a peculiar caste or profession, "down" (Celtic *dûn*), describing a feature of physical scenery, and "boast," denoting a feature of the national character, few monuments of the race have been preserved in the language of their conquerors.[1]

On the other hand a very large part of the English vocabulary is derived from the Latin. When we pass the boundaries of common conversation, and use the terms of science, art, and literature, words drawn from this stock usually supply us with the instrument required to give the necessary shade of meaning. Our poetry and oratory have produced their finest effects by the combination of Latin with Saxon words, and the same is true of the

[1] Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, Preface, xviii.

language of worship as expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer*. But one significant circumstance shows that, in the vast majority of words of Latin descent, the immigrant alien has been forced to adapt itself to the genius of the native stock. The tonic accent in such words has been removed from the syllable on which by the law of the Latin language it originally fell, and has been placed, as far back as possible, on one of the syllables containing the stem of the word. Thus at their first introduction into the English language the words, nátuře, hónour, Sáturn, and cómmon were pronounced—and according to their derivation correctly—natúre, honoúr, Satúrn, commúne.

The invasion of Britain by the Saxons, whether it originated in the natural overflow of populations or in piratical adventure, seems to have been an incident in the great movement of tribes on the borders of the German Ocean which took place in the fifth century of the Christian era. Little is known for certain regarding the details of the conquest, but Bede's statement that the invaders came in three vessels containing Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, is perhaps a mythological reminiscence of the three great tribes who gradually brought the country under their dominion. It is generally admitted that Hengist and Horsa, who are said to have landed in Kent in 449 A.D., were Jutes; Ælla and his sons who subdued Sussex in 477 A.D. were Saxons, as were Cerdic and his nephews, who in 530 A.D. founded the kingdom of Wessex. The Angles, on the other hand, first established themselves in East Anglia, Bernicia, and Deira, that is to say, from Norfolk to the Frith of Forth, the northernmost part of which district was afterwards separated into the kingdom of Northumbria. The Anglian kingdom was founded in 547 A.D.; afterwards Penda, also a chief of the Angles, constituted the kingdom of Mercia in 626 A.D. From the speech of these various tribes rose the four chief English dialects, Northumbrian, West Saxon, Mercian, and Kentish.

All the invading tribes employed the Low German variety of the national tongue, and the monuments they

have left to us in it present a faithful image of Teutonic manners in respect to the holding of land, the recognition of family descent, and religious belief and custom. As a member of a victorious host, every ceorl, or freeman, was entitled to his allod in the conquered settlement, and to his share of common pasture on the mark or boundary that surrounded it. The earl, on the other hand, owed his position of superior rank and influence to his illustrious descent from a line of heroic ancestors, traced by the genealogical bard up to the eponymous founder whose existence was derived from the gods. Each of the earls, again, was attended by his *comitatus*, the remarkable body that makes so prominent a figure in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the members of which, as personal retainers of a lord, forfeited their legal status as freemen, but yet, through the liberality of their chief, enjoyed a larger share of wealth and power than the ceorls. The gods of the Saxons were the common Gothic deities, Woden, Thor, Freia, and Tiw—beings of limited powers, who, in the somewhat melancholy system of Teutonic mythology, seem to be unequal to cope with the mysterious forces of evil. Their abode is in Asgard, which lies above Mitgard, the earth, being separated by it from Niflheimer, the seat of bad and malignant spirits. Many religious rites and customs springing out of this ancient polytheism were retained by the Saxons long after their conversion to Christianity; and among them may be mentioned the May-games, the Whitsun Ales, the bringing-in of the boar's head at Yule-tide, the whipping of fruit-trees in spring, beating the boundaries, and the lighting of fires at Epiphany.[1]

Such were the materials out of which was woven the web of Teutonic minstrelsy. As to the metrical form in which the poet's conception was embodied, the following accurate description is borrowed from the writer of a nation with whom that ancient form found its last asylum :—

"Every line of old Teutonic poetry is a blank verse divided into two halves by a line-pause which always comes at the end of a word.

[1] Elton, *Origins of England* (2nd edition), pp. 390-1.

"Each half is made up of a fixed number of measures; a measure being a word, or number of words, of which the first root syllable is stressed, *i.e.* forcibly pronounced, as one does in speaking when one wishes to draw attention to a particular word or syllable. . . . In every line two stress syllables at least, one in each half line, must begin with a similar consonant or a vowel (these vowels being usually different and in later Northern poetry always so). Stress syllables so alliterated are said to carry letter stress.

"In many lines there occur one or more unstressed syllables, which form, as it were, the elastic unmeasured part of the line; these for want of a better term we call slurred syllables, or collectively a slur. It is not meant that these syllables are gabbled over, they may be spoken fast or slow, but that they are redundant or unimportant for the 'make' or structure of the verse, and that they would be less emphasised, and spoken in a less vigorous tone than the rest of the line. There may be one or more slurs in a line.

"When a monosyllabic word is stressed and followed by no enclitic words before the next stress, it is succeeded by a short interval of silence, which we call a rest. Such a monosyllable with its rest is a measure in itself."[1]

In this metrical form were composed all the surviving poems in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. These poems fall naturally into three classes, which indicate the successive stages through which the art of minstrelsy passed: 1. Those which exhibit an unmixed cast of Teutonic thought. Of this class, however, it must be observed that, though the poems it contains (or at least their prototypes) were probably composed before the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity, yet, as they must have been long preserved merely in oral verse, they were liable to alteration when reduced to writing by scribes, who were usually ecclesiastics. 2. Those which were composed after the establishment of Christianity, and in which the poet is seen to be applying

[1] Vigfusson and Powell, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i. pp. 433, 434.

the art of minstrelsy to scriptural subjects. 3. Those in which the influences of Latin ecclesiastical education have prevailed over the Teutonic spirit, the style of minstrelsy being applied to subject matter taken from lives of the saints or from Latin Christian poets. After this point the genius of Anglo-Saxon minstrelsy appears to become extinct. The literary movement, originated by Alfred, produced only prose works, and except for a few stray poems, like the fine narrative of the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, and the *Battle of Brunanburh*, it might be supposed that the art of the scop had disappeared from the life of the Anglo-Saxon race. The causes of this gradual process of decline are well worthy of consideration.

1. The scôp, the fountain of all Teutonic poetry, was a member of the *comitatus*, and like his companions a man of noble birth.[1] It was his business to celebrate in song the wealth, the valour, the descent of his lord, and, in return for the satisfactory discharge of this duty, he received from the latter presents of rings, bracelets,[2] and lands.[3] This mutual relation is characteristically expressed at the end of the "Scôp's Tale," perhaps the oldest composition in the Anglo-Saxon tongue:—"Thus wandering go with their lays over many lands the gleemen of men: their wants they express, their words of thanks they utter; always south or north they find one knowing in songs, liberal in gifts, who desires to exalt his greatness, to show his dignity in the presence of his nobles, until all vanishes, light and life together. He who works praise has under heaven enduring glory."[4] From this passage we see that the gleeman might attach himself to the service of many lords; and indeed the main motive of the "Scôp's Song," which consists almost entirely of proper names, seems to have been a desire to impress his hearers for the time being with a sense of his vast experience, skill, and

[1] "Scop's Tale" (Thorpe's edition of the *Codex Exoniensis*): Hine from Myrgingum æthele onwocon.

[2] "Scop's Tale," *passim*.

[3] "Deor's Complaint," *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 379.

[4] "Scop's Tale," *Codex Exoniensis*, pp. 326, 327.

popularity, without a prosaic regard to the strict limits of truth.[1]

The scopas competed with each other for their lord's favour,[2] and the artist who was worsted might forfeit the benefits previously granted to him. Thus in the "Complaint of Deor" we find the poet encouraging himself in adversity by recalling examples of others who had passed through misfortune. He concludes his song thus: "This will I say of myself, that once I was a scop of the Heodenings, dear to my lord: Deor was my name: for many winters I had a good retainership, a kind lord, until Heorrenda, a man skilled in song, received the land-right which formerly the earl had given me. That I surmounted; so may I this."[3] Sometimes death, or the fortune of war, dispersed the *comitatus*, and one of the most beautiful and pathetic passages in Anglo-Saxon poetry describes the feelings of the scop as he recalls in exile the joyous company of former days: "When sorrow and sleep often together bind the poor solitary one, then in his mind it seems to him that he embraces and kisses his lord, and lays on his knee his hands and his head, as when erewhile in days of old he enjoyed his gifts: then wakes once more the friendless man, and sees before him the fallow paths, the sea-fowl dipping and spreading their wings, rime and snow falling mingled with hail; then grow heavier the wounds of his heart, painful after dreaming, and sorrow is renewed."[4]

The songs of the scopas were sung before the lord and his companions in the ale or mead hall; and an admirable specimen of their art has been fortunately preserved in the *Song of Beowulf*. Of this famous poem the following is an outline:—

Scyld, the son of Scef, was an ancient king of Denmark. He had a son called Beowulf—not the hero of the lay—who again had a son Healfdene. To him were born four

[1] Among the numerous nations which this ingenious person—he probably lived sometime in the sixth century—visited were, it appears, the Hebrews, the Israelites, the Egyptians, the Medes and Persians.

[2] "Scop's Tale," *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 324; see the passage describing Widsith's contest with Skilling in praise of Ealhild.

[3] *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 379.

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 288, 289.

children, of whom the third, Hrothgar, succeeded his father on the throne. Hrothgar built a magnificent hall called Heorot, which was long used by the king and his nobles for the purposes of drinking and song, till it aroused the envy of a horrible demon named Grendel, who ravaged the place with nightly visitations, slaying and carrying off the thanes to his abode in the fens. It seemed that nothing could resist his power, but tidings of the calamity were at last brought to Beowulf, son of Egtheow, and thane of Higelac, king of Gotland, a man of unequalled strength, particularly renowned for his feats in swimming. Filled with a desire to rid the Danish kingdom of the pest, Beowulf crosses the sea in a ship with fourteen companions and is joyfully welcomed by Hrothgar and his court. Unarmed and alone he awaits Grendel in the famous hall, and after a fierce struggle, in which he tears the monster's arm out of the socket, drives him away, vanquished and mortally wounded, to perish in the fens. Hrothgar and his peers exult over the victory, but their rejoicing is premature, for Grendel's mother, an ancient sea-wolf, comes the next night into the hall and carries off one of the thanes. Beowulf now undertakes a new and still more perilous adventure. He descends in full armour into the sea, where he meets Grendel's mother swimming, and, being seized by her, is carried off to her cave, where, in the combat that ensues, he is near losing his life. Eventually he conquers her, and cutting off the heads of herself and her son returns to his companions who have given him up for lost. After being loaded by Hrothgar with gifts, blessings, and good advice, Beowulf returns to Higelac in Gotland, and relates to his lord, and Hygd, his queen, the various adventures through which he has passed. Afterwards Higelac falls in battle against the Franks, and Beowulf, who escapes from the slaughter by his great skill in swimming, is entreated by Hygd to mount the throne in place of her infant son Heardred. The hero, however, refuses, and loyally acts as guardian to the young king during his minority. The latter is in course of time killed in battle, and is then succeeded by

Beowulf. After ruling the kingdom in prosperity for fifty years, the hero undertakes a final adventure against a dragon, or fire-drake, who is wasting the country in revenge for the theft of a portion of a hidden treasure, over which, after the manner of his species, he has for several centuries been keeping watch and ward. Beowulf just contrives to kill this reptile, but not before he has himself received mortal hurt from the venomous wounds which his enemy inflicts upon him, and the poem ends with a description of the burning of his body on a gigantic funeral pile.

The interest attaching to this famous poem arises in part from its antiquity, but still more from the protracted dispute about the nature and origin of the composition, between the critics of the school of Wolf on the one hand, and those who maintain the theory of a single authorship on the other; and as the controversy has a strong bearing on the view which is here put forward as to the progress of Anglo-Saxon poetry it will be necessary to consider it in outline. The English editors of *Beowulf* have, without exception, held that the work, as we have it, is an original composition proceeding from the mind of one author. Mr. Arnold, in his edition of 1876, argues that the poet was a Christian and an ecclesiastic, and that *Beowulf* was the literary result of an Anglo-Saxon mission for the Christianising of the Danes in the eighth century. Professor Earle, in the preface to his translation (1892), considers that the poem was probably composed in the tenth century, at the court of Offa, king of Mercia, and that it was of the nature of an "Institution of a Prince." Both Mr. Arnold and Mr. Earle agree, however, in thinking that the song, as we have it, was written down as soon as it was composed. The German followers of Wolf, on the other hand, and in particular Karl Müllenhof, regard the poem, in its existing form, as a fortuitous collection of ancient lays, brought into a kind of unity when the story was first reduced to writing, and afterwards altered and added to by the hand of a late editor. So strongly did this conviction take possession of the mind of Müllenhof, that he had the assurance to pronounce

1395 lines of the single existing MS excrescences on the original poem.

The general reader, brought face to face with such harsh oppositions of criticism, has constant need to remember that, whatever conclusion he may arrive at, he can never pass beyond the region of probabilities. If he is wise, he will agree with Seneca that life is too short to settle such questions judicially, and will be content with making use of each hypothesis up to the point at which it seems consistent with the general spirit and character of the written text. For example, without adopting Wolf's extreme conclusions, it may be allowed that his method of reasoning throws a highly suggestive light on the origin of the *Iliad.* There is an antecedent improbability that the great poem we assign to Homer should, with all its elaboration of art and manners, have sprung from the unassisted invention of a single mind. But it is equally improbable that the poem as we possess it, showing such distinct signs of unity in thought and workmanship, should have been the product of a mere fortuitous concourse of poetical atoms, reduced to a kind of form and order by the manipulation of a late literary age. In order to reconcile these two opposite improbabilities, we want some middle position of probability, and this middle position is surely Homer himself. To imagine an age of archaic minstrelsy in which the events of a past, dimly remembered and magnified by distance, should be recorded in rude forms of art, is only to suppose that the first generations of Greek poets resembled in genius their unpolished kinsmen of the Teutonic tribes. Nor is it difficult to believe that, with the growing sense of refinement, a great master of the art of minstrelsy should have perceived, before the invention of letters, how these primitive materials might be welded into a beautiful and harmonious form of song. That the composition of such a singer, handed down by the powerful memory of unlettered ages, should have been preserved till the time came when it could be enshrined in written characters, is an hypothesis warranted by reason and

experience; whereas it appears in the highest degree unlikely that, if the unification of the *Iliad* was not attempted till the time of Pisistratus, all mention of the fact should have been omitted by critics like Plato and Aristotle.[1]

Now if we apply a similar process of reasoning to the story of Beowulf, it seems that the hypothesis of Müllenhof, apart from the extravagant use which is made of it, is well calculated to throw light on the origin of the composition. At any rate it accounts for many features in the poem which the interpretation of the English critics leaves in obscurity. For if, with Mr. Arnold and Professor Earle, we suppose *Beowulf* to be a deliberate literary composition, we must also with them conclude the author to have been a "Christian and an ecclesiastic." But in that case how are we to account for the unmistakably heathen texture of the story? Mr. Arnold, who puts forward his theory in a spirit of admirable moderation, explains this by supposing that the Anglo-Saxon poet obtained his materials from the heathen Danes whom he was seeking to convert to Christianity. I confess I find a difficulty in conceiving that any person, animated with the primitive zeal of a Teutonic missionary, would have also carried on his perilous enterprise the tastes of a literary *dilettante*. For the same reason I can scarcely think that, even if the ingenious moral allegory, which Professor Earle finds in the story, could be readily extracted from the text, this would have been the kind of "Institution" employed in the training of a Christian prince. Surely the history of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons gives us every reason to suppose that, if moral instruction was given in the court of King Offa, the methods employed would have been those of the Latin Church, and the teaching that of the Gospels.

But again it is evident that the style of *Beowulf* is not that of a literary poet, but of a minstrel. Had it been a deliberate literary composition, it would have exhibited some traces of central design, and its joints

[1] The reader will find this subject discussed with learning and completeness in Mr. Andrew Lang's *Homer and the Epic* (1893).

and articulations would have been carefully marked; but the poem as it stands is a medley of heterogeneous materials, singularly wanting in plan and consistency. A literary "Demiurgus" of Anglo-Saxon descent, and separated by a long period from the events which he professed to be recording, would undoubtedly have tried to produce an appearance of order in his creation, by furnishing a clue to his historical allusions. But nothing can be more careless and casual than the references to the heroic exploits, the family relationships, and the tribal feuds of the persons and nations mentioned in the course of the story. This is just what might be expected in the style of oral minstrelsy; it is indeed an exact reproduction of the style of Homer. Exceedingly Homeric, too, are the stereotyped forms employed by the narrator to indicate stages in the action: the words prefatory to speeches, *e.g.* Beowulf maðelode, bearn Ecgþeówes, Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow; τὸν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα Γερήνιος ἱππότα Νέστωρ—formularies of description, such as, "The time flew on; the ship floated on the waves; the bark lay under the hill and the seamen with alacrity climbed on to her stern; the streams rolled; the water dashed against the sands"[1]—the descriptions of objects by means of metaphors, as "hyrde folces," the shepherd of the people, ποιμένα λαῶν; "fealone flod," the fallow flood, ἀτρύγετος θάλασσα; "ban-loca," bone-locker, meaning flesh, just as Homer speaks of the "fence of teeth," ἕρκος ὀδόντων—and the use of conventional epithets like "ellen-rôf," confident in his might, κύδεϊ γαίων. From these and similar characteristics I am inclined to infer that the poem, in its existing form, was composed for the purpose of chanting or recitation, on lines long familiar to the Teutonic race, and by the aid of materials derived perhaps from a remote antiquity. But it is not, therefore, necessary to assent to Müllenhof's dogma

[1] Compare with this the conventional Homeric formula in the *Odyssey*:—

"οἱ δ' αἶψ' εἴσβαινον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθῖζον,"
"ἐξῆς δ' ἐζόμενοι πολιὴν ἅλα τύπτον ἐρετμοῖς."
*Odyssey*, ix. 103, 563, and xii. 146.

that it is a *mere* assemblage of unconnected lays, each of which may be regarded as having once formed a separate whole. The unity of the work lies in the deeds and character of Beowulf, and this central conception shows every sign of having proceeded from the mind of a single poet, though it was doubtless built by him out of materials previously existing. That he was a Christian and sang before a Christian audience is evident, but I do not think we need conclude with Mr. Arnold that he was an ecclesiastic. It seems to me more reasonable to suppose him a scop of the roving kind described in *The Traveller*, who was accustomed to wander from court to court, entertaining the lords who supported him with the legends of ancestors common to the race.[1] On this hypothesis there would be no difficulty in understanding why the exploits of Danes and Swedes should have been recited in the court of an Anglo-Saxon king. Whether the poem was altered or added to after it was reduced to writing is a question of comparatively trifling importance.

Thus much it has been necessary to say in support of the proposition that *Beowulf* is to be regarded as a sample of the minstrelsy prevailing among the Anglo-Saxons before their conversion to Christianity. For whatever may be the date of the composition, it is clear that in the essence of its mythology, in its treatment of history, and in its representation of manners, the poem affords a vivid reflection of primitive Teutonic life. As regards mythology, it is of course impossible for us to form a clear conception of the manner in which our ancestors reasoned about nature; but the demons and monsters mentioned in *Beowulf* must in some way have represented to them the wasting forces of evil by which mankind are beset. Moreover, it is to be observed that the chief of these malignant beings—Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the fire-drake—are each associated with different elements. The Christian poet is indeed at much pains to point out that Grendel was a descendant of Cain; but

[1] See p. 83.

he has preserved the ancestral belief about this fiend, which makes him "a great stepper over the mark, who held the moors, the fens, and the wilderness"[1]—an interesting relic of the primeval religion by which all the land belonging to the mark or boundary of the tribe was left uncultivated and regarded as accursed. Grendel may, therefore, have been a personification of plague and pestilence, by which Hrothgar's bright hall of Heorot was ravaged. In Grendel's mother, the old sea-wolf, who takes vengeance on the Danes for the death of her son, we find a trace of the curious Teutonic belief that the prime power of evil was born of woman, an idea long preserved in the common English expression, "devil's dam."[2] The description of the places haunted by this ancient fiend, when on shore, is a remarkable piece of painting, showing the terror with which the waste scenery of the mark-land filled the imagination of the people:—

"They inhabit the dark land, wolf-haunted slopes, windy headlands, the rough fen-way where the mountain stream, under the dark shade of the headlands, runneth down, water under land. It is not far from hence, a mile by measure, that the mere lies; over it hang groves of dead trees, a wood fast-rooted, and bend shelteringly over the water; there every night may one see a dire portent, fire on the flood. No one of the sons of men is so experienced as to know these lake depths; though the heath-ranging hart, with strong horns, pressed hard by the hounds, seeks that wooded holt, hunted from far, he will sooner give up his life, his last breath, on the bank, before he will hide his head therein. It is not a holy place. Thence the turbid wave riseth up dark-hued to the clouds, when the wind stirreth up foul weather, until the air grows gloomy, the heavens weep."[3]

Besides Grendel's mother there is a horrible race of animals, "many creatures of the serpent kind, strange sea-monsters exploring the deeps, as also Nixes lying on the

[1] *Beowulf*, 102-108.
[2] See Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (Stallybrass), vol. iii. pp. 1007-9.
[3] *Beowulf*, 1357. T. Arnold's translation.

headland slopes which in the mid-day time often notice [sailors while they are plying] a weary voyage," and drag them down to the bottom of the sea.[1] Lastly, there is the fire-drake, the venomous serpent, who is slain by Beowulf in his last combat, but not before the hero himself has been mortally wounded with the monster's poisoned breath. The dragon is an animal of frequent occurrence in Teutonic legend, usually associated with hidden treasure. In the Edda it appears as Fafnir, the monstrous worm that guards the hoard, and is slain by Sigurd, while, according to the tradition preserved by the thane in *Beowulf*, the same feat is assigned to Sigemund, father of Sigurd.[2] Beowulf's death closely resembles that of Thor, as recorded in the Edda, where it is related that the god killed the Mitgard snake, but was himself suffocated by the floods of poison which his enemy vomited forth in his last agony.

Beowulf, who disposes of all these pests, appears in the poem under a double aspect. On his mythological side he is represented with something of the character of Hercules, and is the personification of strength and endurance, semi-divine attributes which he perhaps acquired from his namesake Beowulf, the legendary king of Denmark, whose name is said to be connected with the word Beawa or Beowa, meaning "Cultivator."[3] In this sense it is easy to believe that the story presented to the Teutonic mind a parable of the victory of human skill over the destroying powers of nature. But Beowulf chiefly figures in the poem as the thane of Higelac, and in this capacity, if not historical himself, he is mixed up with the persons and events of history. For there can be no doubt that Higelac, king of the Geatas, Beowulf's lord, is the same monarch as Chochilaicus mentioned in the *History of Gregory of Tours*,[4] and in the *Gesta Regum Francorum*, as having been killed by the Franks in a descent on the country of the Attoarii (the Het-ware of *Beowulf*, 2913). This event occurred in A.D. 511, and it is therefore not unreasonable to conclude

[1] *Beowulf*, 1425. [2] *Ibid.* 875-897.

[3] T. Arnold's edition. Glossary, p. 209.

[4] *Gregorii Turonici Historiæ Francorum*, iii. 3; *Gesta Regum Francorum*, cap. xix.

that other incidents recorded in *Beowulf* and other poems —such as the reconciliation of the Heathobards and the Danes by means of the marriage of Freawara with Ingeld (*Beowulf*, 2025); the renewal of the blood-feud at the wedding-feast (*Ibid.* 2041); the attack of the Heathobards on Heorot (*Traveller's Song*, v. 49); and the death of Heardred, the young king of the Geatas (*Beowulf*, 2385)—have also a firm basis of fact. The royal genealogies, alike of the Danes and of the Geatas, as given in the poem, are no doubt faithful records of fact, but, as we pass from these family traditions into more remote antiquity, it is to be observed that the historical element gradually melts into legend. Thus the historic name of Hermanric (the Eormenric of *Beowulf*) is associated with the palpable fable of Hama, his thane, who is said to have incurred his lord's enmity by carrying off the famous Brisinga-men, or necklace of Freia. After this we leave the region of history, and find ourselves in the cycle of heroic mythology, amidst stories of Sigemund and Sigurd, at which point the life of the heroes merges in the life of the gods. As in Greek mythology, the historic sense of the bard seems unable to extend itself through family records for more than two or three generations above the date of the historic exploits which form the groundwork of his song.

*Beowulf* abounds in admirably vivid descriptions of Teutonic manners. When the hero and his companions land in Denmark, they are conducted to the presence of King Hrothgar, who is sitting in the mead-hall surrounded by his thanes. After announcing their errand—

"Then was a bench cleared for the sons of the Geatas [to sit] close together in the beer-hall; there the stout-hearted ones went and sat exulting clamorously. A thane attended to their wants, who carried in his hands a chased ale-flagon, and poured the pure, bright liquor. A scop between-whiles sang with clear voice in Heorot."[1]

The feast having advanced to a certain point Hrothgar's queen comes into the hall, bearing a cup of mead, which, in the first place, she offers to the king, and after-

[1] *Beowulf*, 491. T. Arnold's translation.

wards bears round to the rest of the company. In the same manner Hygd, the queen of Higelac, is represented performing a similar office after the return of Beowulf to Gotland, and occasionally distributing bracelets. Liberality of this kind was the most essential quality in the character of a Teutonic ruler. Hrothgar was fully alive to his duties, and the presents which he lavished on Beowulf after the destruction of Grendel and his mother were of the most costly description ; but he warns Beowulf against following the example of Heremod who, "though the mighty God exalted him with the delights of power and with pre-eminence, and brought him forward above all men, yet in his heart there grew a secret hoard of bloodthirsty desires ; he was far from giving rings to the Danes according to justice in right ; joyless he abode, till he suffered the results of that struggle, a lingering general ruin. Teach thou thyself by him, understand munificence."[1]

There is an exceedingly interesting touch in the poem illustrative of the Teutonic institution of the *Were-gyld*, whereby each man's life was valued in money. One of Beowulf's companions having been killed in Heorot, Hrothgar "gave orders to pay the price in gold of that one man whom Grendel had wickedly slain."[2] But still more characteristic are those passages in which the genius of the poet has been fired by the spirit of the *comitatus*. Beowulf is accompanied to his fight with the fire-drake by his body companions. Unhappily these did not do their duty in the hour of need : "Not then in a band did his chosen comrades, sons of nobles, stand around him with their soldierly virtues ; but they crouched down in the wood, their lives to save."[3] There was, however, one noble exception :—

"Wiglaf spake many solemn words, said to the liege-men (his soul was sorrowful) : 'I remember that time that we took mead, when we promised to our lord in the beer-hall, who gave us these precious things, that we would pay him for his war equipments if such as this should befall him —the helmets and hard swords which he chose for us in the

[1] *Beowulf*, 1715. T. Arnold's translation.
[2] *Ibid.* 1053. [3] *Ibid.* 2596.

army of his own accord for this expedition—reminded us of deeds of fame, and to me treasures gave for this cause, because he accounted us good spearmen, keen helmeted soldiers.' " [1]

He rushed to the assistance of his lord, and helped him to kill the dragon, though he was unable to save his life. After the fight the shame-faced *comitatus* find him sitting by the body of the dead king.

" Wiglaf spoke, Weohstan's son, the sad-hearted man looked on the hated ones: 'Lo! this may he say who desireth to speak truth, that the liege lord who gave you these arms of price, the cavalry trappings in which ye stand there (when he on the ale-bench used often to give helmet and coat of mail to those sitting in the hall, the prince to his thanes, such as he could find anywhere of the most splendid sort, far or near), absolutely flung away in vain those warlike accoutrements. When battle surprised him, the people's king needed not by any means to boast of his comrades on the march; yet God, the ordainer of victories, granted him that he alone with his blade might avenge himself when he had need of valour. . . . Too few defenders thronged around their prince when the emergency came upon him. Now shall the taking of treasure, and the distribution of swords, all joy of estates and kindness, cease for your kindred: each man of the clan-burgh may go about destitute of land-right after that nobles from afar shall learn of your flight, your inglorious deed. Death is better for every earl than ignominious life.' "

Passages of this kind seem to breathe all that is most noble in the spirit of chivalry, and explain the vigorous growth of the institution. A valuable parallel to them exists in the historical poem on the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, in which some scop of the tenth century describes the battle of Maldon between the Danes and the Saxons. Byrhtnoth, brave ealdorman of East Anglia, falls in the fight. Then, says the poet:—

" Cowards turned to flight. First, the sons of Adda: Godric forsook the noble one who had given him many a

[1] *Beowulf*, 2631. T. Arnold's translation.

horse, and fled upon his lord's own steed; and with him his brothers Godwine and Godwig, and more of the warriors than was at all becoming. Æthelred's eorl, the people's prince, had fallen; all of his kindred saw that the lord lay slain. The proud warriors rushed up, willed either to avenge the dear one, or to yield their lives. Ælfric's son, the young warrior Ælfwine, exhorted them. He said: 'Think of the speeches which we often spoke at mead, when we raised up vaunting on the bench, heroes in the hall, about hard battle. Now may be shown who is bold. I will show forth my lineage to all, that I was of a high race in Mercia. My old father was called Ealdhelm, a wise ealdorman, worldly prosperous. Never shall the thegns reproach me among the people, that I would desert this host, and seek my country now that my prince lies slain in battle. That is my greatest grief; he was both my kinsman and my lord.'"[1]

But the *Death of Byrhtnoth* is a late and almost solitary survival in Anglo-Saxon poetry of the ancient art of minstrelsy. Of the poems contained in the *Exeter Book* and the *Vercelli Book*, there are few that exhibit any signs of the old mythological traditions, the warlike temper, or the tribal manners, that give so much life to the *Song of Beowulf*. Many of them, however, are animated by a spirit which, in its own way, is almost equally characteristic of the Teutonic temper. Without any direct trace of Christian influences, they nevertheless breathe an air of melancholy reflection very different from that love of movement and activity which distinguishes the heroic sagas. Sometimes this feeling embodies itself in verses of gnomic wisdom, sometimes it is expressed dramatically, in the reverie of an old sailor looking back on his sufferings on the sea, or of an exile remembering the joys of old companionship. A more philosophical vein of thought runs through a remarkable poem inspired by the sight of an ancient and ruined city, apparently Bath, destroyed by the minstrel's barbarous countrymen :—

[1] Ten Brink's translation. *History of Early English Literature* (Kennedy's translation), p. 195.

"Wondrous is the wall-stone; the fates have broken it, have wrecked the borough; ruined is the work of giants; fallen are the roofs, tottering the turrets, the hoary gate-towers all ravaged, hoar-frost on the mortar, shattered the battlements, shorn away and sunken, under-eaten by Eld."

"Many a chief of yore," continues the poet, "gleeful and gold-bright, gloriously apparelled, haughty and flown with wine, shone in his armour, looked on treasure and on silver and on curious gems, on luxury and possessions, and on this bright borough of a broad kingdom. There stood the courts of stone; hot ran the stream, widely whirling. The wall compassed it all in its bright bosom. There were the baths, hot on the breast: that was health-giving!"[1]

2. The genius of reflection which prevails in poems of this kind is largely to be ascribed to the natural decline in the spirit of action. Cut off from their kinsmen on the Continent, the Saxons acquired something of the character of their conquered enemies—*penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.* The various tribes pent within their insular boundary might struggle with each other for supremacy, but the limits of the several kingdoms soon defined themselves, and within these the recognition of the rights of private property, and a settled system of law and justice, deprived the bard of many of the themes suggested by the once perpetual movement of war and migration. But there is another, and a still more interesting class of surviving Anglo-Saxon poems, which exhibit the effects of a newly-imported Christianity on the ancient springs of heathen song. In these the poet, leaving the records of Teutonic mythology, chooses his subjects entirely from the Scriptures, but translates them for the benefit of his hearers into the time-honoured diction of tribal minstrelsy. This new development of the art is admirably illustrated by the story of Cædmon.

Christianity, introduced into Kent in 597 A.D. by Augustine, was carried within thirty years by Paulinus

[1] *Codex Exoniensis*, pp. 476-478.

into Northumbria, in which kingdom it spread with great rapidity. The heathen idols were overthrown, and churches and abbeys sprang up in all parts of the country. Yet the people retained many of their primitive customs, and among them the practice of singing in the mead-hall the old legends and traditions of their race. Almost every one took part in this diversion, but one man, Cædmon, seemed so devoid of the gift of song, that whenever he saw the harp approaching him he would rise and leave the company. One evening, after he had done so, he fell asleep in his house, and saw in a vision a heavenly form which commanded him to sing. Cædmon replied that he knew neither how nor what to sing. "Sing," said the vision, "the origin of things," and then pronounced the verses which Bede has preserved in his *History*, and which open the *Paraphrase of Genesis*, commonly believed to be the work of Cædmon. In the morning Cædmon remembered the verses, and repeated them to his friends, through whom the wonderful occurrence came to the ears of Hilda, Abbess of Whitby. By her the powers of the new poet were tested, and found to be so remarkable that, though he knew no Latin, yet, on a passage of Scripture being explained to him, he was able to turn it into poetical Saxon diction of such sweetness as to attract large audiences from all the neighbouring countryside.

It seems probable that some of the poetry in the *Metrical Paraphrase*, once ascribed to Cædmon, is the work of a later mind;[1] but this is a fact of no importance

[1] We have no evidence beyond the passage in Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv. 24) for assigning any of the poems in the *Metrical Paraphrase* to Cædmon, who, as we know from the historian, had many followers and imitators. In default, however, of any positive evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to suppose him the author of those poems which answer to Bede's description: "Canebat autem de Creatione Mundi, et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Ægypto et ingressu in terram repromissionis, de aliis plurimis sacræ Scripturæ historiis, de Incarnatione Dominicâ, Passione, Resurrectione, et Ascensione in Cœlum, de Spiritus Sancti adventu, et Apostolorum Doctrinâ." The passage in Genesis describing the Temptation and Fall of Man is evidently an interpolation (a very fine one); and the poem describing Christ's Descent into Hell is the work of some poet who was better acquainted than Cædmon is likely to have been with the Apocryphal Scriptures.

in considering the modifications in the art of minstrelsy introduced by Christianity. It is, on the other hand, most significant to observe how many of the fundamental notions of Teutonic mythology and custom are interwoven with Cædmon's reproductions of the Scripture narrative. Thus the image by which the Bible always suggests the torments of Gehenna is *fire;* but the old German conception of Niflheimer, or the under-world, was a place of cold and mist, and these conflicting ideas are strangely blended in many passages at the opening of Cædmon's Genesis, in which the poet seeks to paint the abode of the devil. For example:—

"Then was God angry and wroth with that host whom formerly He had honoured with beauty and renown. For those traitors He shaped a house of banishment, with anguish for their reward, the groans of hell, hard punishments. Our Lord, Guardian of spirits, bade a house of torment await the exiles, deep, void of joys. When He knew that it was ready, furnished with perpetual night, charged with sulphur, filled throughout with fire, *with intense cold*, smoke and red flame, then through that house void of comfort He bade the dread of torment to increase."[1]

And again:—

"Therefore them in a worse light God had placed triumphless in a dark hole; there at even they have, each of the fiends, an immeasurably long renewal of fire; and ere dawn comes, the east wind, frost, bitter cold, [piercing like] fire or dart."[2]

Mists, too, and vapours prevail in this region as in Niflheimer: "God himself hath swept us into these swart mists" (thas sweartan mistas).[3]

In the Teutonic creed, monstrous serpents coil round the world, like the Mitgard's Ormr; or lurk underneath it, like the snakes that haunt the spring Hvergelmir, or the dreadful reptile which fought with Thor. A reminiscence of these horrors pervades the description of hell as painted in the *Descensus ad Inferos*, a late addition to the

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 3. [2] *Ibid.* p. 20
[3] *Ibid.* p. 25.

Cædmonian cycle. "Ever at hell-gate," says the poet, "dragons dwell, hot in spirit, they may not help us."[1] Hence it is imagined that "the floor is on fire with venom scorched," and hell itself is described as "a horrid den with venom blended."[2]

The vividly real descriptions of hell in these poems, recalling the style of Dante, could only have been given by one familiar with the traditions of polytheism. Thus in one passage the poet tells us: "Verily he might hear who was twelve miles from hell that there was teeth-grinding loud and mournful."[3] And when, in the *Descensus ad Inferos*, Satan is cast finally into the burning pit, it is said that, "when he stood on the bottom there seemed to him to be from thence to hell-gate an hundred thousand miles of measured space."[4] Something, too, of the old heathen terror of the mark-land, an example of which has been given before, fills the minstrel's animated rendering of the march of the Israelites out of Egypt. "The heavenly candle (*i.e.* the pillar of fire) burned, the new night-ward must perforce rest over the hosts, lest the horrors of the waste, the hoar heath with its raging storms, should overwhelm them, their souls should fail."[5]

Nor is the ancient spirit less conspicuous in the paraphrase of those portions of Genesis which relate to war or military organisation. Abraham is described in the genuine Teutonic vein as "the bold earl"[6]; Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is "the dispenser of treasure."[7] When Satan is meditating his rebellion in heaven, he reasons with himself as follows:—

"Heroes stern of mood have chosen me for their chief, renowned warriors; with such may one take counsel, with such folk companions shape it. They are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts; I may be their leader, rule in this realm: thus it seems not right to me that I in aught should cringe to God for any good. I will no longer be his younger (vassal)."[8]

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 270.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 266; see also p. 273. [3] *Ibid.* p. 283. [4] *Ibid.* p. 310.
[5] *Ibid.* pp. 184, 185. [6] *Ibid.* p. 110. [7] *Ibid.* p. 111. [8] *Ibid.* p. 19.

We seem to be listening to some powerful count reckoning up the force of his *comitatus* in view of a conflict with his feudal superior. So, too, when the paraphraser has to describe the battle between the four against the five kings, an image of a tribal battle rises in his mind :—

"Then was hard-play, an exchange of deadly weapons, a great war-cry, a loud crash of battle. The warriors from their sheaths drew their ring-hilted swords of doughty edge." [1]

Abraham comes to the rescue of the defeated party :—

"Then the holy man bade his hearth retainers take their weapons; warriors he found there, bearers of the ashen spear, eighteen and three hundred beside, faithful to their lord, of whom he knew that each could well bear into battle the yellow linden." [2]

The foregoing extracts serve to show how many characteristics of the old minstrelsy were preserved in the Cædmonian cycle of song. Different as was now the aim, changed as were the materials, of the poet, the Christian bard resembled his heathen predecessor in this, that he was able, by means of familiar images and diction, to arrest the imagination of a popular audience. Though he no longer sought to move them by the memory of their tribal belief and traditions, the new themes he touched on his harp were of a kind to rouse their elemental emotions. The wandering life of the patriarchs and the children of Israel, the records of family descent, the dramatic incidents of Biblical history, related in a manner equally simple and sublime, struck direct chords of sympathy in the German heart; while many notes of Hebrew poetry itself, such as the frequent use of "parallelism" and metaphor, are reproduced in the style of the Anglo-Saxon minstrel. In a word, the most noticeable feature in Cædmon's art is the readiness with which an exotic class of subjects becomes naturalised in the old poetical soil.

3. Very different is the character of the Saxon poetry of later date. As Cædmon is the single name which typifies

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 121. [2] *Ibid.* p. 123.

the style of the Scripture paraphrasts, so Cynewulf stands forth as the most illustrious representative of what may be called the Latin school of poets who succeeded Cædmon. This poet has left the seal of his authorship on several of his poems in the form of Runic letters composing his name, but we have no certain knowledge of the time or place at which he lived. By some he is supposed to be the same as Kenulphus, Abbot of Peterborough in the beginning of the eleventh century;[1] and though the style of his poems suggests an earlier date, we may at least infer from what he says of himself that he was an ordained priest. Like Cædmon his poetical genius seems to have been late in its development.

"I knew not at all," he says in his *Elene*, "the truth about the cross, until Wisdom revealed to me wider knowledge through her glorious power over the thoughts of the mind. I was an enemy by wicked works, fast bound with sins, vexed with sorrows, in cruel bondage, compassed thick with cares, until the King of armies, by my heavenly ordination, bestowed knowledge upon me for comfort to me when aged, measured out his bounteous grace, and poured it into my mind, displayed clear light to me, and made it broad at times, set my body free, opened my heart, and caused poetic power to break forth in me, which I have used in the world with pleasure and good-will."[2]

The works certainly of Cynewulf's composition are the *Legend of St. Guthlac*, the *Legend of St. Juliana*, *Christ*, *Andreas*, *Elene*, and the *Fortunes of the Twelve Apostles*. Besides these, there are several poems in the *Exeter Book*, which, if not by him, are inspired by motives similar to his, such as "Riddles," the paraphrase of the poem on the "Phœnix," ascribed to Lactantius, the "Panther," the "Whale," etc.

The peculiarity of these poems is that they are, all of them, based on Latin originals, whether in prose or verse, viz., 1. Lives of Saints; 2. Homilies; 3. Physiologi, or Books on Natural History; 4. Late Latin Poets.

[1] Kemble, *Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis*, Preface, p. viii.
[2] *Elene*, Weymouth's translation, p. 36.

They differ also in motive from the Cædmonian paraphrases. The first race of Christian Anglo-Saxon minstrels sang to the people, conveying to them by poetry an elementary knowledge of the truths of Christianity, which no form of preaching could have imparted with equal lucidity. Their poetical successors had a purpose likewise didactic, and the methods they adopted were in some respects the same; but their teaching was addressed not so much to laymen as to monks. Such alterations in the conditions and aims of minstrelsy acted as solvents on the primitive character of the art. It was not that the new school of poets was wanting in genius; on the contrary many single strokes in their compositions give proof of skill and fancy. A great number of critics are even enthusiastic on behalf of Cynewulf, whom in point of sublimity they are ready to raise to a level with Cædmon.[1] This is an estimate I must venture, with all deference, to question, and I am inclined to think that those who have formed it have been misled by the exuberance in Cynewulf of a poetical diction, which often continues after the genuine springs of inspiration have begun to fail.

This much may, at any rate, be observed with confidence about the style of the late Anglo-Saxon poets. As regards their Lives of Saints, on the whole their best performances, though the Latin originals which they paraphrase are prosaic narratives, they are content to follow the main course of the text almost with servility, careless whether the details are or are not suitable for treatment in verse. From this censure, however, the closing portion of the *Legend of St. Guthlac* and the *Andreas* ought to be excepted. In Cynewulf's *Christ* it is difficult to discern any conception of poetical form raising the composition above a homily in verse. On the other hand, there are many signs that Gregory the Great's allegorical method of interpreting Scripture has had a sophisticating effect on the simplicity of the minstrel's art. In one passage Cynewulf follows the conceit of Gregory,

[1] See, for example, Mr. Stopford Brooke's interesting remarks on this poet, *History of Early English Literature*, vol. i. pp. 191-240.

which describes the six "leaps" (*saltus*) of Christ between the Incarnation and Ascension.[1] In another he devotes many lines to considering why it was that the angels appeared in white robes to the apostles after the Resurrection, whereas it is not recorded that they wore them on their appearance to the shepherds at the Nativity.[2] The same characteristic appears in the poems on animals, the habits of which are described, that the poet may have an opportunity of dwelling on the spiritual truth which each of them is supposed to symbolise. In copying the late Latin poets, Cynewulf and his school are content to imitate the trivial subjects of their masters, without reflecting on the radical difference between the Latin and Teutonic styles of poetry, — the terseness and condensation of the hexameter, the expansion and verbosity of alliterative verse. They appear to have greatly admired the *Enigmata* of Symphosius (a third-rate Latin poet of the fifth century), each of which is propounded in three hexameters; but their own "Riddles," couched in the spacious diction of minstrelsy, lose such little character as their originals derived from epigrammatic point. The third "Passus" of Cynewulf's *Christ* is a mere amplification of the fine Latin hymn *De die Judicii*, but whereas this consists of 46 lines the Anglo-Saxon version swells into 330.

Traces of the primitive genius of the race still survive. A dialogue between Joseph and Mary in the First "Passus" of Cynewulf's *Christ* breathes a genuine dramatic spirit;[3] and, in a remarkable monologue addressed by a condemned spirit to the body from which it has departed, we find an interesting relic of Teutonic mythology:—

"The ghost shall come anxiously moaning, always on the seventh night, the soul to find its body that once it quickened, through three hundred years, unless the Eternal Lord, Almighty God, ere that shall bring the end of the world."[4]

[1] See Cynewulf's *Christ* (Gollancz' edition), Part ii. pp. 63-65, and compare with Gregory, *Hom.* 29. 9, 10 (Migne, 76. 1218-19).

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 40-45. [3] *Ibid.* p. 16. [4] *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 367.

The ancient forms of imagery and phraseology are studiously observed. Thus, in the "Passus" of the *Christ* on the Ascension, we read :—

"The Majestic Lord called His band of thanes. . . . Soon were they ready, men with their Lord, for the holy borough, where to them the Lord of Splendour, the Helm of Bliss, revealed many a token in mystic words, ere He ascended, only begotten Son, Child co-eternal with his own Father."[1]

And again—

"Then went to Jerusalem, the valiant men to the holy borough, sad in mood, after they had seen with their own eyes God up-rising, their kind Dispenser."[2]

But the ancient life is departing. The Teutonic spirit, weakened by its isolation from the great body of the race on the Continent, tamed by the softening influences of Christianity, seems on the point of making its submission to the more powerful arts of Latin civilisation, commended to them by the spiritual head of the Church which claimed their full allegiance. Everywhere we feel the all-pervading presence of the encyclopædic education. The way is thus prepared for the introduction of literary prose under the auspices of King Alfred. For it is noticeable that the different translations which the king ordered to be made into the Anglo-Saxon tongue were all of recognised text-books, such as the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede, the *Chronicles* of Orosius, the *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* of Boethius, the *Pastoral Care* of St. Gregory, and that (though his biographer speaks of his love of them) he seems to have made no provision for reducing to writing the vernacular songs of the people.[3] In the prose dialect of Wessex, now accepted as the literary standard, the conventual scholar found an instrument of expression more congenial to him than alliterative verse, and his labours were devoted mainly to the translation of the Gospels, the chronicling of the meagre history of the times, or the preservation of the pious eloquence of great

[1] Cynewulf's *Christ* (Gollancz' edition), v. 456.
[2] *Ibid.* 532.
[3] Asser, pp. 473, 485, 497.

preachers like Ælfric. Anglo-Saxon prose was the offspring of the encyclopædic education of the Church, and when the use of the national language was, for the time, proscribed by the Norman conqueror in school, council, and law-court, it found its last asylum in the monastery. Anglo-Saxon poetry was still composed in a desultory fashion by native minstrels, but such specimens of their art as we possess have only escaped oblivion by happening, like the *Song of the Battle of Brunanburh*, to be embedded in the dreary prose of some monastic chronicler.

Besides the introduction of a fixed literary standard, natural causes were also at work to undermine the structure of oral minstrelsy. The metrical forms of Anglo-Saxon poetry were adapted to the framework of a language in its "synthetic" stage. On the one hand, the absence of the article and of conjunctions, and the use of case-endings, rather than of prepositions, to mark the relations between objects, gave what may be called a *cumulative* character to the rhythm of the sentence. On the other hand, this normal effect was intensified in metre by the use of alliteration, which served to indicate at once the place of the rhetorical emphasis and of the rhythmical pause. Hence the minstrel's natural tendency was to conduct his narrative through a series of abrupt, energetic clauses, packed with those phrases, in immediate apposition with each other, so frequent in Hebrew poetry, and technically called "parallelisms"; the whole effect being well suited to chanting or recitative. The following may be taken as a good sample of the style :—

Fyrst forð-gewât ; flota wæs on yðum,
Bát under beorge. Beomas gearwe
On stefu stigon ; streámas wundon,
Sund wið sande. Secgas bæron,
On bearn nacan, beohrte frætwe,
Guð-searo geatolic ; guman út scufon,
Weras on wil-sið, wudu bundenne.
Gewât þá ofer wæg-holm, winde gefýsed,
Flota fámig-heals, fugle gelicost,
Oðþæt ymb ân-tid oðres dogores

Wunden-stefna gewaden hæfde,
Þæt þa liðende land gesawon,
Brim-clifu blican, beorgas steápe,
Síde sæ-nessas.[1]

In the above passage may be observed examples of many of the synthetic forms of the Anglo-Saxon language: word-endings, marking differences of declension in substantives; differences of number, of gender, and case in substantives and adjectives; of mood and tense in verbs; agreements between substantives and adjectives; and the prefix of the past participle. But even before the Norman Conquest a number of intellectual or phonetic forces were driving themselves like wedges into the compact framework of the ancient harmony, and preparing the decomposed language for the admission of the new metrical forms impressed upon it by the immigration of alien races. The chief of these were the simplification of grammatical forms, the assimilation and contraction of sounds, and the employment of auxiliary words to express relationships originally indicated by internal modifications of a single word.

Under the first head may be reckoned the gradual disappearance of gender in substantives, adjectives, and pronouns. The idea of gender doubtless arises out of a primitive tendency to personify all the appearances of inanimate nature; but, as society advances in intellectual refinement, such distinctions of sex in inanimate objects begin to appear meaningless. Traces of gender may be found even as late as Chaucer; but in the Anglo-Saxon literature, produced within a generation after the Norman Conquest, there are not wanting signs that this mode of

[1] The time flew on; the ship floated on the waves; the bark [lay] under the hill. The seamen with alacrity climbed on to her stern; the stream rolled, the water [dashed] against the sand. The mariners bore a bright freight into the vessel's hold, a well-appointed war-array; the crew—men on a volunteer cruise—shoved off the banded bark. Then the foamy-necked cruiser, hurried on by the wind, flew over the sea, most like to a bird, until about the first hour of the next day, the vessel with twisted stern had run [so far] that the mariners saw land, the sea-cliffs glittering—steep mountains, large headlands.—*Beowulf*, 210-223. T. Arnold's translation.

agreement between substantive and adjective is already falling into disuse.

The tendency to assimilate sounds shows itself most strongly in substantives and adjectives, by the disappearance of the various vowel endings before the growing power of the letter *e*. Pressed on the north by the immigration of the Danes, and on the south by the neighbourhood of the Normans, the Anglo-Saxons found an increasing difficulty in communicating their thoughts by means of inflected words. For convenience of intercourse the people, while preserving the stems of words, containing that part of the meaning which all could understand, sought as far as possible to simplify the endings. All-absorbing as Aaron's serpent, the vowel *e* swallowed up the *a* and *u* which, in the early stages of the language, had been used to mark declensions. By the same power it insinuated itself into the termination *as*, which had itself displaced the various endings formerly employed to distinguish the plural from the singular number. After thus disposing of all its rivals, it reigned supreme through several centuries, exercising a predominant influence over the prosody of the language ; but gradually yielding itself to the power of contraction, it became torpid and finally mute. These different stages of change may be illustrated in the following words :—

| Nom. Sing. | Nom. Plur. |
|---|---|
| Nama—Namë—Name | Naman—Namës—Names |
| Wulf—Wolf | Wulfas—Wulfës—Wolvës—Wolves |

Among the pronouns the principle of simplification is clearly marked in the fortunes of the demonstrative and relative,

| | Masculine. | Feminine. | Neuter. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Se | in the Northern Dialect *the* | Seô | Thæt |

which was originally declined with the usual cases in all its genders and in both numbers. Cases and genders, however, gradually dropped out of use, till at last all that was left of the demonstrative pronoun was the masculine

nominative *the*, transformed into the definite article, and the neuter nominative *thæt* (that), preserved in an indeclinable form to discharge demonstrative functions. In its relative sense *se* was supplanted by *hwâ* (who), *hwylce* (which), pronouns used in the old tongue exclusively as interrogatives, but the neuter *thæt* has retained to this day its force as a relative. The feminine *seô*, modified to *scho* and *sheo*, together with the late accusative of *heô*, *hire*, survive in the feminine demonstrative *she*, *her*.

The Anglo-Saxon verb, while preserving more of its ancient structure than the other declinable parts of speech, had to submit to the same general laws which modified the endings of nouns and pronouns. The principal changes through which it passed were—

1. The plural termination of the present indicative, the old forms *eth* or *ath* having been replaced first by *an*, then by *en*, from which *n* soon disappeared, leaving the *e* gradually to become mute.

2. The conversion of many verbs with a *strong* preterite (*i.e.* a preterite formed by a change in the root vowel) into verbs with a *weak* preterite by the addition of the ending *de* or *te* to the old root. Thus even before the Norman Conquest the verb *slæpan*, of which the preterite was originally *slep*, formed that tense as *slepte*, and *fahren* changed its preterite from *for* to *fohrde*. *Wæpde* (wept), for *weopon*, is found in the Lindisfarne Gospels (950 A.D.).

3. The contraction of the preterite in weak verbs, by omitting one of the vowels in the termination *ode* or *ede*. Thus, in Chaucer, we often find the preterite *answérde* accentuated on the penultimate (or, if the final *e* be cut off, on the last) syllable in consequence of the elision of a vowel before the *d*.

4. The contraction of the infinitive by the omission of the final *n*. Before the Norman Conquest the infinitive *drincan* (to drink) had been contracted to *drinca*; the final *a* was afterwards changed into *e*, and this in course of time became mute.

5. The gradual substitution of the termination *ing* for that of *and* in the present participle.

6. The disappearance of the prefix *ge* from the past participle. This change seems to have begun as early as the time of Alfred.

7. The occasional change of the termination of the imperative plural from *ath* into *as* or *es*, which in course of time became mute.[1]

These natural changes produced striking, though gradual, effects on the prosody of the language that was evolved from the Anglo-Saxon. Conybeare remarks on the great number of "Adonic" verses (– ∪ ∪ – –)[2] in Anglo-Saxon alliterative measures. When, through the genius of Chaucer, the French iambic movement was naturalised in the Middle English, the triple movement, inherent in the old style, instinctively gave way before the new tendency. Great numbers of iambuses and trochees were formed, partly by importation of French words, partly by the pronunciation of the final *e* in verbs and nouns, as the symbol of the former inflections. But the dactylic movement remained in a state of suspended animation till the reign of Elizabeth. It was revived by Drayton in his *Battle of Agincourt*, as may be seen from the following rude but vigorous stanza :—

They now to | fight are gone, |
Armour on | armour shone, |
Drum now to | drum did groan, |
To hear was | wonder, |
That with the | cries they make |
The very | earth did quake, |
Trumpet to | trumpet spake, |
Thunder to | thunder. |

It is easy to recognise here the movement so effectively used by Tennyson in his "Charge of the Six Hundred."

When the *e*, as the sign of inflection, became mute, the language was left provided with a great number of monosyllables. It was accordingly adapted not only for the dactylic movement, congenital with the Anglo-Saxon,

[1] Very interesting illustrations of these gradual changes will be found in Mr. Kington Oliphant's *Old and Middle English* (1878).

[2] Such as "fugle gelicost" in the extract on p. 106. See Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. lxxi.

but for the converse movement, consisting of anapæstic feet, as for example :—

> The Assýrian came dówn like the wólf on the fóld,
> And his cóhorts were gleáming in púrple and góld,
> And the shéen of their spéars was like stárs on the séa,
> When the blúe wave rolls níghtly on déep Galilée.

We see therefore that the various rhythms, which the English language now contains, are the product equally of the internal changes to which it has been subjected, and of the foreign elements which it has incorporated with the primitive Teutonic stock.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANGLO-NORMAN POETRY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH VERSE

THE genius of the Normans stood in bold and striking contrast to that of the Saxons. When the latter, leaving their ancient seats on the shores of the German Ocean, had parted company from their Continental kinsmen, and converted themselves into British islanders, a marked change was produced in their character. Firmly rooted in the conquered soil they abandoned their roving habits; their fixed attachment to their national customs in time developed a settled state of law and order; the softening influence of Christianity promoted the refinement of their manners. Under these circumstances, as we have seen, the scôp's inspiration sank, while the more dreamy and meditative elements in the Teutonic nature were nourished in the congenial climate of monasticism, and submitted to the schooling of the Latin Church.

On the other hand the Northmen, in whatever new abodes they might fix themselves, carried with them the spirit of adventure which first drove them forth from the shores of Norway and Denmark. Their temper was alike braced by the air, and impelled by the restlessness, of the element on which so large a part of their life was spent. In the tenth century they had pushed their way up the Seine as far as Paris, and had won for themselves a great portion of the most fertile territory of France. From Normandy, in the following

century, a cadet of one of the less powerful families, with no resources but his valour, had gone forth to establish a kingdom in the very centre of the civilisation of the ancient world. Not content with this great achievement, Robert Guiscard had encountered and overthrown the armies of the Emperor of the East, and, as the champion of the Pope, had forced the Emperor of the West to retire from the gates of Rome. Later in the same century, William the Bastard effected a more enduring conquest, and, displacing the Saxon dynasty, founded the line of sovereigns which has continued to occupy the throne of England. Dauntless in the face of danger, fertile in resource, swift in resolve, the Norman genius was always prompt to understand, to accept, and to turn to its own account, the circumstances with which it had to deal for the moment. Norman builders, stimulated by their contact with the great monuments of the Romans, the Lombards, and the Arabs, brought to the North of Europe those new principles of construction which formed the starting point for the Gothic style of architecture. Anglo-Norman trouvères gave the first impulse to modern poetry, by blending with the older *chansons de geste* the element of romantic love.

When Rollo and his followers conquered Normandy, they brought with them their scalds, who would of course have celebrated the exploits of their leaders in their native language and the Scandinavian style. But it is characteristic of the race, that within a few generations, they had so completely adopted the common speech, as well as the principles of poetical art of the people whom they had subdued, that there was no noticeable difference between their dialect and that of the other provinces of France which used the *langue d'oïl*. The conquest of England brought fresh modifications, and the poetry of the Anglo-Normans exhibits three well-defined stages. In the earliest stage is still to be found something of the spirit of the old scald, joined to the literary taste of the ecclesiastic trained in the learning of the schools. The chief representative of this school is Robert

Wace,[1] a native of Guernsey, born about the beginning of the twelfth century, who died in England in 1184. Wace worked in two different veins, one of which is illustrated in his *Roman de Rou*, and the other in his *Brut*. The former (composed between 1160-1170 A.D.) is a poem of over 16,000 lines, consisting of four main divisions: in the first of which is related the Conquest of Normandy by Rollo; in the second the history of Rollo's reign; in the third the history of William Longsword and of Richard his son; and in the fourth the history of Richard I. down to the sixth year of Henry I. In dealing with these matters, the prime motive of the poet, as of the scald, is to recite the exploits and the genealogy of his chief; but he is also animated by the spirit of the historian, and, though writing in verse, observes a scrupulous accuracy in his record of recent events. Hence his poem, poor in point of art, is valuable as history, and his account of the battle of Hastings has been justly relied on by modern scholars, as furnishing life-like details of the fortunes of the fight.

The *Brut*, on the contrary, worthless as history, is more immediately connected with the development of modern poetry, since it presents the first faint indications of that influence exercised by Celtic imagination on the Teutonic or Scandinavian genius, afterwards so brilliantly illustrated by the cycle of Arthurian romance. Wace's poem is indeed no more than a metrical expansion of the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth; but the touches which he has added, recording the institution by Arthur of the Round Table, and of feasts and tourneys, introduce into the growing myth the first glimpse of the spirit of chivalry.[2] He is, however, far from yielding to the wild and romantic impulse of Celtic superstition, and, whether from the scepticism of the scholar, or from a

[1] His name is variously given as Wace, Vaice, Gace, Gasse.

[2] Cp. *Roman de Brut*, 9998-10,042 :—

Fist rois Artur la Ronde Table
Dont Bretons dient mainte fable.
. . . . .
Ne tot mensonge, ne tot voir,
Ne tot folor, ne tot savoir,
Tant ont li conteor conté
E li fableor tant fablé
Por leur conte embeleter
Que tot ont fait fable sembler.

certain Northern robustness of mind, he seeks to test the marvels reported to him by the experience of his senses.[1]

The foundations of another cycle of romance were laid about the same time by the Anglo-Norman trouvère, Benoît de Ste. More, who had himself been employed by Henry Beauclerc to write the history of Normandy, but who now turned his infant historical genius in a different direction. His imagination was attracted by the history of the fate of Troy, written by Dares the Phrygian. The minute details in which this work abounds, and which to a more critical sense would have shown it to be a pretentious literary forgery, were to Benoît proofs of the author's accuracy; he accordingly set himself, in the joyous spirit of a trouvère, to convert into the language of poetry the text of what he conceived to be a veracious history. In his hands the Trojan romance swelled into about 30,000 lines, and was followed by the *Roman de Thèbes*, containing the story of Eteocles and Polynices, as told by Statius, and transmuted in the alembic of Scandinavian fancy.

The second, and most important period of Anglo-Norman poetry extends from the close of the reign of Henry II. to the reign of Henry III., and is characterised by the full development of the principle of romance. This class of poem may be described as being the old *chanson de geste*, modified by the assimilation of (1) the machinery of Celtic mythology; (2) the love-adventures of the Greek novels; (3) the religious and chivalrous spirit of the Crusades—various, and sometimes opposite, influences, each of which deserves to be separately considered.

1. After the conquest of Normandy the Northmen, with their wonted intellectual activity, inquired with

[1] He was exceedingly anxious to see the wonders of which he heard in the forest Broceliande, where was the tomb of Merlin, and went thither with great expectations which, however, were grievously disappointed—

La allai jo merveilles querre,
Vu la forest, et vis la terre,
Merveilles quis, mais nes trovai,
Fol m'en revins, fol i'allai,
Fol i'allai, fol m'en revins,
Folie quis, por fol me tins.—*Roman de Rou*, 11,534.

interest about the mythology and poetry of the country. From very early times the testimony of numerous poets and historians, Latin and Greek, shows that the interpreters and preservers of Celtic tradition were the bards.[1] We have equally good reason for believing that the bards' vehicle of poetical expression was the lay.[2] As to the functions of these poets, the subject matter of their lays seems, in respect of warlike exploits and tribal genealogy, to have strongly resembled the art of the Teutonic races; though, from their close association with the Druids, it is probable that their references to religion were more refined and metaphysical. Of their old superstitions few traces remain, but one invaluable passage in ancient literature attests the vitality of Celtic folk lore. Pomponius Mela thus describes certain marvellous maidens in the isle of Seine, reverenced by the ancient Celts:—

"Sena, an island in the British sea opposite to the coasts of the Orismici, is remarkable for an oracle, whose priests, sanctified by perpetual virginity, are reported to be nine in number; they call them Gallizenæ, and believe them to be endowed with singular powers, which enable them to raise the winds and seas by their enchantment, to transform themselves into any animals they please, to cure wounds which in the hands of others are beyond the power of healing, to foresee and predict future events; but to be devoted exclusively to the service of sailors, and to those who come expressly for the purpose of consulting them."[3]

From this we may conclude with something like certainty that the Fées, or Fays, or Fairies, who play so prominent a part in the Arthurian romances, in *Partheno-*

[1] See authorities cited by the Abbé de la Rue in his *Essais Historiques sur les Bardes*, etc., p. 45 (edition of 1834).

[2] Hos tibi versiculos, dent barbara carmina Leudos,
Sic, variante tropo, laus sonet una viro.
Venantius Fortunatus, Lib. 7, *Epistola ad Lupum*.

[3] Pomponius Mela, iii. 6 (48). Compare with this the very curious passage in the *Vita Merlini*, attributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth, describing the *Insula Pomorum*, or Fortunate Island, where, he says, dwell nine sisters who possess the same powers as those described by Pomponius Mela. The eldest is named Morgen, and by her King Arthur is, in time, to be healed of his wound. *Galfridi de Monemuta Vita Merlini* (F. Michel and Thomas Wright, 1837), v. 916. This is the germ of the legend of Avalon.

*pæus of Blois*, and in the *Lays* of Marie of France—the Morgan of early, the Alcina of later fable—supernatural beings, who practise magic, control the elements, and fall in love with mortals, are essentially the creatures of Celtic fancy. Nor can we doubt that the landscape of romance, so delicate, mysterious, phantom-like, evanescent,—the forest of Broceliande, the fountain of Barenton, the island of Avalon, the marvels witnessed in the *Voyage of St. Brandan*, probably the first of the genuine romances,—derives its character from the same source, rather than from the darker and more savage Scandinavian temper which has stamped itself on the scenery of *Beowulf*. Lastly, we may assume with some confidence that the names, and even the outlines of action and character, in the Anglo-Norman romances, are of Celtic origin, and represent vague recollections of history preserved by the oral traditions of the tribes.

2. We must be careful, however, not to impute to tradition and national temperament elements in romance which may be more reasonably ascribed to the operation of literature and invention. And to this latter I should certainly refer the introduction into romance of the representation of love, for the purpose of heightening the interest and adding to the intricacy of the fable. In the old pagan mythology love, in the romantic sense of the word, occupied a scarcely more prominent place than any other principle of human action, and when it did appear, was usually associated, as in the stories of Phædra, Medea, and Dido, with unnatural affection or furious passion. There was not much more room for it in the minstrelsy of the German tribes; the action of *Beowulf* is as little affected by the sentiment as that of the *Iliad*. But when these nations were converted to Christianity, and their manners were gradually softened, a great change began. The presence of a vast disturbing force was observed in a passion which might lead men to violate the sacraments of the Church, or their feudal obligations, in a hundred cases that would not have arisen under the easy code of polytheistic morality. And the violence of this moral

conflict was increased because, partly from primary Teutonic instinct, partly from the lyrical enthusiasm of the troubadours, chivalrous society, male and female, had, by the twelfth century, come to doubt whether, under certain circumstances, the promptings of lawless passion ought not to be regarded as the impulse of a semi-religious devotion. Hence the idea of love began to associate itself with epic and dramatic possibilities of which ancient fiction knew nothing.

The new conception, however, might have failed thus early to embody itself in a literary form, if it had not lighted on a fitting model. When the early Crusaders with their attendant minstrels passed through Constantinople, they must, it can scarcely be doubted, have become acquainted with the Greek novel. Here they would have found precisely the spark that was needed to kindle their inflammable imagination. The stories of Theagenes and Chariclea, Clitophon and Leucippe, Ismenias and Ismene, all turning on the sufferings and adventures of lovers, suggested to the quick fancy of the trouvère how greatly the introduction of such matter would enliven the action of the old *chansons de geste*. To read or to hear was to imitate. In time the authors of the Romances even went so far as to reproduce the prose form of their Greek models, and in their narratives the exploits of Arthur against Saxon and Roman, long blended with the tales of Merlin's enchantments, were relieved by the episodes of the loves of Lancelot and Guenevere, of Tristram and Iseult.[1]

3. Generally speaking, the prose romances of the thirteenth and following centuries reflect vividly the change produced in the imagination and manners of European society by the Crusades. By those wars the different nations of Europe, now divided by opposing aims and interests, were vividly reminded that they were united by a common faith and common origin. The memories of the days of warlike wandering were renewed; religious instinct was kindled into a passionate fervour; while, in the face of the common danger to which

[1] See also pp. 441-2.

all private rights were exposed in the general exodus, every man perceived that it was necessary to strengthen the bonds of feudal obligation. Hence the code of chivalrous honour was summed up under three main heads: the observation of oaths among knights, the succour of women in distress, and attendance at mass. In these various respects the romance writer paid due attention to the tastes of his hearers. The Crusader, fresh from his wanderings in the Holy Land, followed with sympathy the imaginary adventures of the knights of the Round Table; his feelings of mystical piety were satisfied by the legend of the Holy Grail; in the numerous tales of the rescue of distressed damsels he saw an image of his own duties towards women; and in the subtle questions of casuistry, raised by the relations of Tristram and Lancelot with the wives of their feudal lords, problems which interested the whole of contemporary society were presented to him in an ideal form.[1] The chief authors of the Arthurian romances were Robert de Borron, to whom we owe the *Roman du St. Graal* and the *History of Merlin;* and Walter Map or Mapes, who wrote the *Queste du St. Graal*, *Lancelot du Lac*, and the *Mort Artus*. At a later period Lucas de Gast produced the celebrated romance of *Tristram*, and Hélie de Borron completed the cycle with the *History of Gyron le Courtois*. The work last named was composed as late as the reign of Henry III.

The third stage in the development of romantic poetry is marked by the works of Marie of France, a poetess of remarkable genius, of whose life and time we unfortunately know no more than the few stray hints she has let fall about herself in her *Lays* and *Fables*. Her earliest work was in all probability a translation of the fables of Phædrus, or as she entitled it *Ysopet*, which she tells us she "set herself to

[1] This situation is constantly repeated in the *Lays* of Marie of France. By the laws of chivalry any knight who injured the honour of his lord, while in his service, was guilty of felony; a vassal who offended in the same way was guilty of *lèse féodalité*, and was liable to the loss of his fief. The "Lay of Eliduc," by Marie, turns on the former point, and a similar complication is introduced into the "Lai de Lanval," v. 360; and the "Lai de Grailent," 463-476. Lancelot, being Arthur's vassal, was guilty of *lèse féodalité*.

make for the love of Count William, the bravest in this kingdom, and to translate it from English into Romance."[1] "Count William" was probably William Long-Sword, the brave Earl of Salisbury, natural son of Henry II., who died in 1226; and the reputation Marie obtained through this work may have caused Henry III. to order her to publish the collection of her *Lays*.[2] Whichever was her earlier composition, Marie says that, before undertaking her *Lays*, she had thought, like all her predecessors, of "making some *good history*, and translating it from Latin into Romance."[3] But finding that this path was too well-worn, she resolved to take as her models the Breton lays, to which she had so often listened, and to preserve the memory of the old Celtic traditions in the Norman tongue.[4]

It is a little doubtful how much liberty Marie allowed herself in her versions of the poems which she professed to reproduce. In the opening of the "Lai de l'Épine" she seems to wish us to believe that her own lays are faithful translations from MSS., which were actually in existence in the monastery of St. Aaron at Caerleon.[5] But she speaks ambiguously, and as she hastens to add that there can be no question about the *oral* authority of the lays, I should be inclined to conclude that her reference to

[1] Pur amur le cumte Willaume,
Le plus vaillant de cest royaume,
M'entremis de cest livre feire,
Et de l'Angleiz en Roman treire.
*Poésies de Marie de France* (Roquefort), vol. ii. p. 401.

[2] En l'honur de vos, nobles Reis,
Ki tant estes pruz e curteis,
A ki tute joie s'encline,
E en ki quoer tuz biens racine;
M'entremis de Lais assembler.
*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 44.

[3] Pur ceo començai a penser
D'aukune bone estoire faire,
E de Latin en Romaunz traire.
*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 44.

[4] Des lais pensai k'oï aveie
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
Ke pur remanbrance les firent
Des aventures k'il oïrent,
Cil ki primes les comencièrent,
E ki avant les . . . vièrent
Plusurs en ai oï conter,
Ne voil laisser nes oblier:
Rimez en ai, e fait ditié
Soventes fiez en ai veillié.
*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 44.

[5] Qui que des Lais tigne a mençonge
Saciés je nès tiens pas à songe;
Les Aventūres trespassées,
Que diversement ai contées,
Nès ai pas dites sans garant;
Lés estores en trai avant;
Ki encore sont a Carlion,
Ens le monstier Saint Aaron,
E en Bretaigne sont séues,
Et en pluisors connéues lius,
Pour chou que les truis en mémore,
Vous wel demonstrer par estore,
De deus enfans une aventure,
Ki tous-jours a été obscure.
*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 543.

MSS. was merely a device, resembling Chaucer's when he seeks to gain credit for his *Troilus and Cressida* by imputing the original to Lollius, an imaginary Latin historian. This opinion is confirmed by the short poetical advertisement which Marie appends to each of her stories, saying that out of the same subject matter the Bretons had made a lay. In any case the style, the colour, in a word, the character, of the poems are all her own, and are such as could only have been imparted to them by a writer intimately acquainted with the most refined tastes and manners of the time.

The great merit of Marie as a poet lies in the skill with which she has blended the opposing elements of the *fabliau* and the romance. Her tales are often no longer than those of the *Decameron*, but she has contrived to animate each of them with all the interest of a complicated drama. The attention of the reader is always arrested by the central situation; and we are not surprised to learn from one of her rivals that she was especially successful in pleasing the female part of her audience.[1] Of the fifteen lays ascribed to her thirteen turn immediately on love, and the other two on a marvel of nature and a striking dramatic situation.[2] Many of the tales are enlivened by incidents representing the transformation of men into the lower animals, of magical enchantments, and other episodes of fairy machinery. The sentiments and speeches assigned to the different actors are full of a delicate propriety which adds greatly to the interest of the story.[3] Equally admirable are the descriptions, whether the objects be of nature or art; for Marie, like a true woman, loved to please the imagination

[1] Denys Pyramus, author of *Parthenopæus of Blois*, and one of the most popular poets of the time, says of her in his *Vie de Saint Edmond*, cited by Roquefort, vol. i. p. 8—

Ses Lais soleïent as Dames plaire,
De joie les oient et de gré,
Car sunt selun lor volenté.

[2] Viz. "Bisclaveret" and the "Lai del Fresne." The situation in the latter bears a curious resemblance to the story of Griselda.

[3] This is perhaps specially observable in the "Lai d'Eliduc," where the situation is one of peculiar difficulty.

of her female hearers, only recently introduced to the luxuries of the East, by dwelling in her verse on the silks of Constantinople, the purple cloth of Alexandria, basins of enamelled gold, mantles of ermine, and beds carved in gold, inlaid with precious stones, cypress, and ivory, in value above the price of a whole castle. In a word, she may be described without exaggeration as the founder of the *art* of poetry both in France and England. As a fabulist she showed the way to La Fontaine. As a story-teller she joined the brilliance and vivacity of Boccaccio to a chivalrous refinement of feeling which is too often absent from the tales of the *Decameron*. Chaucer himself studied with care and advantage the style of a poet who had preceded him by one hundred and fifty years.

While the genius of Anglo-Norman poetry thus expanded in the patronage of a splendid court, and under the intellectual stimulus of the Crusades, and while it drew fresh nourishment from the various sources of Latin, Celtic, and Oriental imagination, Saxon literature sank into torpor and decay. Though "Englisc" was still the language of the vast majority of the people, it was banished from use in school, laws, law-court, court, and castle. Its last literary asylum was the monastery. Since the restoration of the strictness of Benedictine rule under the direction of Dunstan, there had been a great revival of monasticism in England, and many of the regular clergy were patriotically anxious to preserve the standards of the national literature, as well as to promote the interests of the convent to which they belonged. Even here, however, there was little opportunity for arresting the progress of decline. The genius of the old poetry had been sapped by the introduction of Christianity, and the intellectual energy of the race had been turned by the efforts of Alfred into the channel of prose, without however being recruited by many fresh sources of invention. Except in the way of histories, homilies, and translations, there were few compositions in Anglo-Saxon prose; and for the third class even of these, there was, in consequence of the decline of general culture after the death of Alfred

but little demand. The Saxon clergy were trained to express themselves in Latin as well as in their native language, and therefore needed no translations; the homily, where it was not simply transcribed from ancient models, was naturally affected by the forms of contemporary speech; to chronicle current events became, accordingly, almost the only surviving motive of composition. A valuable example of these histories remains in the Peterborough Chronicle; but its necessarily narrow range of interests, its corrupted vocabulary, and rude syntax, are the outward signs of an expiring literature. The grammatical framework of the Anglo-Saxon language was perishing from disuse.

Two influences from outside conspired to hasten its dissolution. One was the rapid change in the current speech of the country, to which the homilist in his sermons strove to conform, and to which, whenever he reduced his addresses to writing, he adapted, as well as he could, his system of orthography. This tendency is best illustrated in the *Ormulum*, a series of metrical homilies composed by Ormin, or Orm, a canon regular of the order of St. Augustine, who must have written in the northern part of the country about the beginning of the thirteenth century. The object of Ormin was to convey instruction to the people by means of homilies, and, with this end in view, he paraphrased the Gospel of each day in the Anglian dialect, adding an exposition of the doctrine to be derived from it. The opening of one of these homilies will serve to illustrate the author's style, and will show the extent to which he had departed from primitive literary models [1]:—

An preost was onn Herodes dazz,
  Amang Judissken theode,
And he wass, wiss to fulle soth,
  ȝehatenn Zacharize,
And haffde an duhhtiz wif that wass
  Off Aärones dohtress;

[1] A priest there was in the days of Herod, among the people of the Jews, and he was, certainly in full sooth, called Zacharias; and he had a virtuous wife that was of the daughters of Aaron; and she was, certainly

And ȝho wass, wiss to fulle soth,
Elysabæth ȝehatenn.
And teȝȝ wærenn biforennn Godd
Rihhtwise menn and gode.
For eytherr here ȝede swa
Rihht affterr Godess lare,
Thatt nan mann noht ne fand onn hemm
To tælenn ne to wreȝenn,
Noff whatt menn mīhhtenn habbenn nith
Ne wratthe ȝæn heore owwther.

There is not a single word in this passage derived from the French; the vocabulary of the language is still completely Teutonic. On the other hand we see that the inflections of words have in some instances disappeared, and, what is far more remarkable, the syntax has undergone something like a revolution. The words now follow almost exactly the order of the thought; and the sentences and clauses, instead of being cumulative as in the old language, are linked to each other by conjunctions. Lastly, alliteration is discarded; and though the verse does not rhyme, yet in the number and fall of its accents, and in the equalisation of the number of syllables in each verse, it anticipates the "ballad metre" of later days. The *Ormulum* is a valuable literary monument, in so far as it shows the secret process of reconstruction by which the Anglo-Saxon language was being transformed, and the influence indirectly exercised, by the iambic rhythm of Anglo-Norman verse, on the ear even of those who were least affected by French literary models.

Ormin addressed himself to a homely audience. A different tendency is reflected in the verse of Layamon, who must have been Ormin's contemporary, but whose *Brut* exhibits, in a far more striking and interesting manner, the gradual fusion of the Norman with the Saxon genius. Layamon was the parish priest of Arley, near Bewdley, in Worcestershire, and his poem, written in the Mercian dialect, was evidently intended for a wider and

in full sooth, called Elisabeth: and they were before God righteous folk and good; for each of them walked so rightly after God's lore, that no man might find in them aught to blame or accuse, nor anything for which men might have envy or wrath against either.—*Ormulum*, *Homiliæ secundum Lucam*, I.

more instructed circle of readers than those who listened to the homilies of the Anglian canon. At the opening of *Brut* he recites his authorities, endeavouring, like all mediæval poets, to claim more historical weight for his performance than is justly due to it. His materials, he says, were obtained from a book in English by St. Bede, from another in Latin made by Sts. Albin and Austin, and from a third in French made by a clerk called Wace. From Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which he doubtless read in King Alfred's translation, he took nothing but the story of Gregory the Great and the Anglo-Saxons; the book of Albinus does not exist in a separate form; Layamon's sole original is, in fact, Wace's poem of the same name, which, as has been already said, is itself a metrical rendering of the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. But the French text is treated with such true Anglo-Saxon expansiveness, that its meagre substance is swelled into a narrative of about 30,000 lines; and, though Layamon follows Wace's lead closely enough, he does not hesitate to introduce historical episodes of his own,[1] or to touch here and there the Latin-Celtic legend with a colouring of Teutonic mythology.[2]

In many passages of the *Brut* the spirit of the old scôp seems to revive, and to produce effects resembling those found in Cædmon's *Paraphrase*. As the simple Scripture narrative of patriarchal life touched primitive chords in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, causing it to transform the historic style of Genesis and Exodus into the language and imagery of minstrelsy, so Layamon, a genuine poet, felt the charm of Celtic romance even through the stolid disguise of Wace's version, and gave it new life in the heroic verse of his own nation. One of the

[1] Among others he inserts the story of St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne, and the killing of Gratian by Ælfwald and Ethelbald, "churls" of East Anglia.—Layamon, 11,917, 12,253 (Sir F. Madden's edition).

[2] Arthur marching upon Bath arms himself for battle: "Then did he put on his helmet embroidered with steel, which an elvish smith made for him with his noble craft; he was called Wygar, who wittily wrought it." *Brut*, 21,130. This seems to be a reminiscence of the Teutonic legend of Wieland the Smith.

most noticeable features in his narrative is its dramatic character, which furnishes a striking contrast to the bald manner of Wace, even where the latter has himself dramatised the simple narrative of Geoffrey. Take for example the passage in which each poet tells the story of King Lear's treatment by his daughter Goneril. This is Wace :—

"Goneril was too avaricious, and thought great scorn of her father, because he maintained so great a retinue, and did nothing for it. Much was she burdened with the cost; often to her lord she said: 'What are we to do with this crowd of men? By my faith, sire, we are mad in that we have brought here so many people. Nor does my father know what he is doing; he is entered into mad riot; he is old and doting. Evil be to him who shall keep him for a year, or shall feed so many people for him. His servants strive with ours, and ours run away from them. Who could endure so great a press? He is false and his folk perverse. There is never a man who serves him willingly, for the more he gets the more he wastes. Very wrong is he who assembles so many people: there are too many of them; let them go on their way. My father has a train of fifty; from henceforth let them be forty in all with us; or let him depart with all his people; what does it matter to us?'"[1]

Wace then proceeds to relate crudely how King Lear was turned out of doors, and obliged to go to Regan. But Layamon, though paraphrasing Wace's text, tells the story in a very different style :—

"Then it came to pass soon afterwards that Goneril bethought her what she might do. Very ill it seemed to her with regard to her father's state, and she began to complain of it to Maglan, her lord, and said to him in bed as they lay together, 'Say to me, my lord—thou art dearest of men to me—methinks my father is no whit sane; no worship he knows; he has lost his wit; methinks the old man will dote anon. He keeps here forty knights day and night; he maintains here these thanes and all their men, hounds, and hawks: therefore

[1] Wace, *Brut*, 1905.

we have harm; and nowhere do they speed, and ever they spend; and all the good we do them they blithely receive it, and only thanklessness comes to us for our good deeds. They do us much dishonour: our men they beat; my father has too many idle men. All the fourth part let us thrust forth; thirty is enough for him to wait at table. Ourselves have cooks to go to the kitchen; ourselves have porters and cupbearers enough. Leave we some of these many folk to go where they will; as ever I hope for mercy I will suffer it no more.' This heard Maglan that his queen spake thus, and he answered her with noble speech: 'Lady, thou art very wrong; hast not thou riches enough? but keep thy father in bliss, he will not live long. For if foreign kings heard the tidings that we did this to him, they would reproach us. But suffer him to have his folk as he will; and this is my counsel, for soon hereafter he will be dead, and we also shall have in our hand the half of his kingdom.' Then said Goneril: 'Lord, be thou still; let me do everything and I will send them away.' She sent with her snares to the knights' house; she bade them go their way, for she would feed them no more; many of the thanes, many of the men that were come thither with Lear the king. This heard King Lear, therefore he was very wroth. Then spake the king with woful words, and thus said the king, sorrowful in mood: 'Woe worth the man that hath land with honour and giveth it to his child while he yet may hold it; for oft it happens that he repents thereof.'"[1]

Layamon, who was stirred thus deeply by the genius of the ancient Saxon poetry, naturally sought to mould his matter in the traditional forms of song. But his metrical style remains a striking monument of the inward changes wrought in the language since it had passed from the lips of the singer to the pen of the literary composer. It was not only that terminations had been assimilated, genders confused, inflections dropped, the weak ending of the preterite tense substituted for the internal change of

[1] Layamon, *Brut*, 3277.

the vowel: the whole character of the metrical sentence had been altered by the introduction of the article, by the frequent use of conjunctions, and by the constant association of the preposition "to" with the infinitive mood. The abrupt, energetic effects of the ancient recitation were modified to suit the literary style of the historian, and the rhythmical period was broken up by the insertion of numerous wedges, in the shape of small auxiliary words, which pointed the logic of the thought, while they destroyed the compactness of the syntax.

In a measure distinctively Teutonic the influence of French verse is of course scarcely perceptible; Layamon's vocabulary contains scarcely more foreign elements than Ormin's. The laws of alliteration, however, are not strictly observed; in many verses the dominant letter is capriciously distributed; in others it is altogether absent; and the alliterative couplet is often replaced by a rhyming one. Compared with *Beowulf*, the metrical structure of the *Brut* resembles those debased forms of architecture in which the leading external features are reproduced long after the reason for their invention has been forgotten.

Ormin had done something to approximate the movement of Anglo-Saxon to the cadence of Anglo-Norman verse. Layamon, by catching his inspiration from a French history of what was now the native country of both races, had helped to propagate among his countrymen a new feeling of poetical patriotism. But a wider and stronger influence was needed to bring the stubborn Saxon genius into perfectly familiar relations with French literary models. That influence was supplied by the encyclopædic training of the Latin Church. In the monastery the devotion of the Saxon monk to Rome, and the Norman zeal for orthodoxy, could join in frank alliance, and each was affected in the same way by the educational discipline which there prevailed. From the beginning of the eleventh century a great intellectual movement had been expanding the aims of the monastic schools. They still adhered with tenacity to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and to the authority of

the early Fathers, but the temper of the age had given that first impulse to the study of mathematical and physical science, which was carried on with ardour by the fathers of scholastic Philosophy. One of the favourite subjects for treatment in Latin was the *Computus*, which dealt with the divisions of time, especially in their relations to the festivals of the Church; *Physiologi* in various forms were frequently produced; at the beginning of the twelfth century Saxon writers were acquainted with the science of the Arabs; and by the middle of the same century John of Salisbury showed himself equal to a review of the various systems of ancient philosophy.

Stimulated by this intellectual atmosphere Norman and Saxon scholars rivalled each other in reproducing in their own vernacular tongues the learning they had acquired from Latin texts. In the early years of the twelfth century Philip de Thaun of Normandy wrote a *Computus* in French verse of three accents, and a few years afterwards a *Bestiaire* in lines partly of six syllables and partly of eight syllables.[1] An English *Bestiary* made its appearance not long after the period of Ormin, composed in verse which evidently contains the germ of the octosyllabic measure, mixed however with remains of the alliterative principle.[2] The matter of this book is borrowed entirely from the *Physiologus* of Theobaldus Episcopus, and consists of descriptions of animals such as the lion, the eagle, the serpent, the fox, the ant, the spider, the whale, the elephant, the turtle, and the panther, with short allegorical applications of their attributes to things human and divine.[3] As the metrical forms of the Latin original are very varied, comprising hexameters, spurious Sapphics, and rhyming measures, it is not unlikely that the versification of the English version is modelled on that of the French *Bestiaire*; but there are English poems, certainly as old as the first half of the thirteenth century, which, evidently

[1] See Wright, *Popular Treatises on Science in the Middle Ages*. The editor prints two rhyming lines as one.

[2] See Morris, *Specimens of Early English*, Part i. p. 133.

[3] The title of the Latin original is *Phisiologus Theobaldi Episcopi de Naturis Duodecim Animalium*.

springing from a monastic source, may have rather imitated rhythmical movements in the Latin language. Such is the interesting *Moral Ode*, the oldest MS. of which dates back to A.D. 1250, but to which competent authorities have assigned still higher antiquity. This poem has an iambic movement of seven accents, contained within fourteen or fifteen syllables, resembling the metre of the *Ormulum*, except that the couplets are linked with rhymes, as in the following example :—

Ich am eldre than ich wes · a winter and eke on lore.
Ich welde more than ich dude · my wyt auhte beo more.
Wel longe ich habbe child ibeo · a werke and eke on dede.
Thah ich beo of wynter old · to yong ich am on rede.
Unneth lif ich habbe ilad · and yet me thinkth ich lede.
Hwenne ich me bethencke · ful sore ich me adrede.[1]

In some respects the Latin language provided the Anglo-Saxon, in its period of transition, with a more suitable model than the French, since the former, having preserved its synthetic framework, furnished, like the Saxon, a great number of double rhymes ; it also suggested to the new English poets the form of the stanza in which masculine and feminine rhymes alternate, as in this *Orison to the Virgin Mary* :—

Thu art hele and lif and liht,
And helpest all mon-kunne :
Thu us havest well i-diht ;
Thu ȝeve us weole and wunne ;
Thu brohtest dai and Evë niht,
Heo brohte woht, thou broghtest riht,
Thu almesse and heo sunne.
Bi-side to me, lavedi bright,
Hwenne ich shall wende heonne,
So wel thu miht.[2]

[1] I am older than I was in winters as well as in learning ; I know more than I did ; my wit ought to be more. Full long have I been a child in work and also in deed : though I be old in winters, I am too young in counsel. Uneasy is the life I have led, and still methinks lead ; when I think on it I am sore afraid.—Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 58.

[2] Thou art healing, and life, and light, and helpest all mankind. Thou hast well clothed us ; thou givest us weal and joy ; thou broughtest day and Eve night ; she brought woe, thou broughtest right : thou mercy and she sin. Look upon me, lady bright, when I shall go hence, as well thou mightst.—*Ibid.* p. 160.

French influence, however, undoubtedly determined the important question of the distribution of the accent in the infant English metres, as may be seen from the prevalence in our early poetry of verse of three accents, from the reduplication of which arose the "Alexandrine," and of the octosyllabic line of four accents, which, till the close of the mediæval period, remained the most popular measure in the language. The beginnings of Alexandrine verse may be noted in the following stanza from a poem on "Domesday" of the thirteenth century:—

Hwenne ich thencke of Domesday
Full sore ich may adrede:
Ther shal after his werk
Uych mon fongen mede:
Ich habbe Crist agult
Wyth thouhtes and wyth dede:
Louerd Crist, Godes Sune,
Hwat is me to rede?[1]

The earliest work in which we find the simple octosyllabic couplet used with any degree of artistic skill is the remarkable poem called *The Hule and the Nightingale*, a composition which deserves attention for other than metrical reasons. In almost all the surviving English poetry of the thirteenth century the influence of monastic education predominates. The subjects selected for metrical treatment are either of an exclusively religious nature, consisting, as we have seen, chiefly of homilies, hymns to the Virgin, and thoughts on the Last Judgment, or involve such scientific topics—Bestiaries and Calendars—as fell within the circle of ecclesiastical study. The treatment of these subjects is for the most part conventional. Here and there, no doubt, particularly in poems expressive of the love of Christ or devotion to the Virgin, strong individual feeling prevails, and, as in the stanza from the *Orison to the Virgin* cited above, produces, on an imperfect metrical instrument, strains of a peculiar sweetness and melody. But, as a rule, the motive of composition is

[1] When I think of Domesday sorely may I be afraid; then shall each man obtain his reward according to his work; I have offended against Christ with thought and with deed; Lord Christ, Son of God, what shall be my counsel?—Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 163.

no higher than a wish to imitate, in vernacular diction and verse, ideas which first impressed themselves on the mind of the writer in a Latin form. In *The Hule and the Nightingale*, however, we make the acquaintance of a mind which has attempted to think for itself, and an invention capable of shaping discursive fancies and sentiments in a poetical mould.

The poem is framed on a regular design. A nightingale, sitting on a bough covered with blossom, perceives close by her an owl on an old stock, and forthwith begins to abuse him for his general habits and his appearance. The owl replies, and both parties resolve to refer their dispute to "Maister Nichole of Guldeford," as being a man well skilled in the judgment of such questions. Far, however, from bringing the matter at once before the arbitrator, they proceed to fight it out in good set terms and in alternate speeches, the nightingale's main attack being directed against the owl's ill-omened song and dark and solitary habits, while the owl dwells on the idle singing of his adversary, and on all the evils that flow from it. Upon this latter point the nightingale is ready with her defence[1]:—

"Hule, thu axest me," ho seide,
"ȝif ich kon eni other dede
Bute singen in sume [? sumer] tide,
An bringe blesse for an wide.
Wi axestu of craftes mine?
Betere is min on than alle thine;
Betere is o song of mine muthe,
Than al that euer thi kun kuthe;
An lust, ich telle the warevore.
Wostu to than man was ibore?
To thare blisse of houene riche,
Thar euere is song and murȝthe iliche;
Thither fundeth everich man
That enithing of gode kan.
Vor thi me singeth in holi chirche,
An clerkes ginneth songes wirche,

[1] "Owl, thou askest me," she said, "if I can do anything else but sing in the summer time and bring bliss far and wide. Why askest thou of my skill? Better is my one than thy all. Better is one song of my mouth than all that ever thy kind knoweth; and list, I tell thee wherefore. Knowest thou for what man was born? For the rich bliss of heaven, where there is ever song and mirth in like manner. Thither goeth every man that knows anything of good. Therefore men sing in holy church, and clerks begin the

That man i-thence bi the songe
Wider he shal; an thar bon longe,
That he the murʒthe ne vorʒete
Ac thereof thenche and biʒete,
An nime ʒeme of chirche stevene,
Hu murie is the blisse of houene."

The owl, however, is not to be beaten [1]:—

"Thu seist that thu singist mankunne,
An techest hom that hi fundieth honne,
Up to the songe that ever ilest;
Ac hit is alre wunder mest
That thu darst liʒe so opeliche.
Wenest thu hi bringe so liʒtliche
To Godes riche al singinge?
Nai, nai! hi shulle wel auinde
That hi mid longe wope mote
Of hore sunnen bidde bote,
Ar hi mote euer kume thare.
Ich rede thi that men bo ʒare,
An more wepe thane singe
That fundeth to than houen kinge;
Vor nis no man witute sunne;
Vor thi he mot, ar he wende honne,
Mid teres and mid wope, bete
That him bo sur that er was swete.
Tharto ich helpe God hit wot!
Ne singe ich hom no foliot.
For al me song is of longinge,
An imand sumdel mid woninge,
That mon bi me him bithenche
That he grom for his unwrenche.
Mid mine songe ich him pulte
That ghe grom for his gulte."

work of song that man may think by means of that song whither he must go, and where he shall be for long, so that he may not be forgetful of that mirth, and may think thereof and profit by it and take heed of the voice of the Church how merry is the bliss of heaven" (*Hule and Nightingale*, 707-728). —Wright, *Early English Poetry*, vol. ii.

[1] "Thou sayest that thou singest to mankind and teachest them that they go hence up to the song that lasts for ever; but it is of all wonders the greatest that thou darest lie so openly. Thinkest thou so easily to bring them to God's kingdom all singing? Nay, nay! they shall certainly find that it is with long weeping that they must pray for a remedy for their sins, before they can ever come there. I counsel thee that men be ready, and rather weep than sing who go to the King of heaven, since there is no man without sin. Therefore he must, ere he go hence, with tears and with weeping pray that that may be bitter to him which once was sweet. Thereto I help, God knows; nor do I sing to men any foolishness. For all my song is of longing,

The debate is continued with great spirit on both sides; among other arguments, the owl accuses the nightingale of using her powers of singing for the purpose of seduction, while the nightingale hints that the owl's claims to superior knowledge bring him under the suspicion of witchcraft. Throughout the dispute the owl appears as the more powerful logician, but matters are made equal by the nightingale's gift of invective, till at last, when the latter has exhausted her ammunition, she begins to sing a song of triumph, summoning all the other birds to her assistance. Greatly enraged at these feminine tactics, the owl threatens to use violence, but is deterred by the interposition of the wren, who suggests to the disputants that it is time for them to submit their quarrel to Master Nichole. To this they agree, and go to look for their judge at his house at Portisham in Dorsetshire; but as to the ultimate decision of the dispute the author professes his inability to give the reader any information.

From this account it will be seen that the poet has, with considerable art, applied the established form of French metrical composition known as the *Disput* or *Débat* to the scientific matter, with its accompanying symbolism, found in the Latin Bestiaries or *Physiologi*. In particular he seems to have studied the *De Naturis Rerum* of Alexander of Neckham, a work of the early part of the thirteenth century. What the precise intention of his allegory was we can only conjecture. It is plain that he was in orders, and, to judge from the two passages cited above, which summarise the spirit of the argument on either side, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the dispute was meant to represent the opposite opinions of the strict monastic party, on the one side, and of the more latitudinarian among the secular, and even the regular, clergy, on the other.[1] There is also an evident personal

mingled sometimes with wailing, that man by means of me may bethink him to be sorrowful for his wicked deeds; with my songs I urge him to be sorry for his sin" (*Hule and Nightingale*, 847-72).—Wright, *Early English Poetry*, vol. ii.

[1] Other passages in the poem seem to confirm this view. Thus the nightingale having observed that the owl is hateful to God and to all who wear linen, the owl at once answers, "stark and strong"—"What! art thou hooded? or cursest thou all unheeding? I wot thou doest so for the

feeling at work, for at the conclusion of the poem the birds, uniting in their praise of Master Nichole, complain of the bishop and the rich patrons in the diocese for not having given preferment to so just and learned a man.[1] But whatever the meaning of the writer may have been, he was certainly a poet capable of forming a clear conception of his subject, and of giving expression to it in a well-proportioned composition. The characters and arguments of the disputing birds are well distinguished, and the slight dramatic touches with which the narrative is enlivened are in excellent taste.[2] Not only has the author shown real power of invention in adapting the allegorical spirit of the Bestiary to his own ends, but he has understood how to combine the clerical spirit of these manuals with the romance of the Breton lay. When he borrows for his argument an anecdote from Alexander of Neckham, he shows an appreciation of the improvements made in the story by the colours added in the version of Marie of France.[3] The influence of French models is

sake of a priest's dwelling. I know not if thou canst sing mass: enough thou knowest of cursing: it is all for thine old envy that thou cursedst me at other times."—(*H. and N.* 1173). The nightingale's argument as to the use of sweet singing is taken from Alexander of Neckham, *De Naturis Rerum*, De Philomenâ, cap. 51, "Nonne jam vitam claustralium pro oculis cordis constituis, noctes cum diebus in laudem divinam expendentium?"

[1] The owl says that rich men are in the habit of putting their children into livings to enjoy the tithe (*H. and N.* 1768-76).

[2] The poet, for example, shows a great sense of propriety in making the *wren* bid the combatants "keep the peace," for in the legends of the Middle Ages the wren claimed to be king of the birds.

[3] He had undoubtedly read Alexander of Neckham's chapter on the Nightingale in the *De Naturis Rerum*, for he says, "Once thou didst sing, I know well where, by a bower, and wouldest lure the lady to an evil love; and thou didst sing both high and low, and leddest her to do shame and wrong of her body. The lord soon perceived that and set lime and gins, well I wot, to trap thee. Thou didst soon come into the snare, thou wast taken in a gin though it repented thee of thy misdeeds. Thou hadst no other judgment or law, but wast torn to pieces by wild horses." Compare with this Neckham's —"Miles enim quidam nimis zelotes philomenam quatuor equis distrahi præcipit eo quod secundum ipsius assertionem animum uxoris suæ nimis demulcens eam ad illiciti amoris compulisset illecebras." But the detail of the snares is from Marie de France's "Lai du Laustic," 95—

Il n'ot Vallet en sa meisun
Ne face engin, reis, a lasenus,
Puis le mettent par le vergier.
Ni ot codre, ne chastainier,
U il ne mettent laz u glu,
Tant que pris l'unt e retenu.

indeed very noticeable throughout the poem, not indeed in the vocabulary, which is singularly archaic, but in the syntax, where the words closely follow the order of the thought, and in the rhythm, which, both in the distribution of the accent and in the number of the syllables in each verse, shows a careful study of the style of Marie.

*The Hule and the Nightingale* is written in Southern English, and must have been composed in the early part of the reign of Edward I., since Henry III. is spoken of as dead.[1] The work of an author living in that part of the country where literary refinement was the most widely spread, and which was readily accessible to Continental influence, it shows, as was to be expected, the strong interest which Englishmen were beginning to feel in the questions now agitating every country in Europe, and is indeed, in many respects, a curious anticipation of the line of thought followed by Jean de Meung, in his satirical addition to the *Romance of the Rose.*[2]

In the meantime a very different set of causes was bringing about a coalition between the Norman and Saxon elements in other parts of the country. Northumbria and East Anglia, while they had been more exposed than Wessex to the ravages of the Danes, had for this reason been less affected by the spirit of literary cultivation encouraged by Alfred. The inhabitants, however, retained the old religious fervour which had characterised them since the time of Cædmon, and this native impulse was heightened and promoted when the Danish immigrants were also converted to Christianity.

After the Norman Conquest large grants of land in Yorkshire were made by the Conqueror to Alan, Duke of Brittany, and were by him sub-infeudated to numerous

[1] King Henri,
Jesus his soule do merci.
*Hule and Nightingale*, v. 1090.
Thomas Wright supposes that Henry II. is referred to, but I think that the obvious allusions to the works of Neckham and Marie of France make this hypothesis untenable.

[2] The nightingale's defence of herself for singing of love reflects much of that scholastic materialism which is embodied in the latter part of the *Romance of the Rose*. Compare for example vv. 1335-1508 with the speech of Genius, *Roman de la Rose*, v. 19,704.

Norman families who, while they spread their national tastes over the neighbourhood, imbibed the devotional spirit native to the soil. In the thirteenth century William de Wadington wrote in French, for these Norman inhabitants of Yorkshire, his *Manuel des Pechiez*.[1] The Saxons on their side acquired a taste for French art, and, as we have already seen, Ormin, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had learned to adapt the Teutonic tongue to a foreign rhythmical movement.

As time advanced, the new forms of art became completely naturalised. In the second half of the thirteenth century, an East Anglian poet, reviving the tradition of Cædmon, paraphrased the books of Genesis and Exodus in octosyllabic verse. He shows, however, none of Cædmon's inspiration, and his version, which is a literal reproduction of the text of Scripture, is without interest, except as a landmark indicating the progress of French influence in the North and East. The language is on the whole perhaps less archaic than that of *The Hule and the Nightingale*, which conforms more closely to the established literary standard; on the other hand, the metre is less strict in observing the French rule of confining each line to an equal number of syllables; for example—

> For sextene ger ioseph was old
> Quane he was in-to egypte sold;
> He was iacobes gunkeste sune,
> Brictest of wastme, and of witter wune.[2]
> If he say hise brethere mis-faren,[3]
> His fader he it gan un-hillen[4] and baren.

Sometimes assonant rhyme is used instead of consonant, as

> Thes othere brethere, sone on-on,
> Token leue and wenten hom.[5]

And, generally speaking, the work is that of an imitator, who admires a style which he is only imperfectly able to reproduce.

[1] This work will be found printed side by side with Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* in Mr. Furnivall's edition of that poem.

[2] Brightest of form and of wise genius.

[3] If he saw his brethren do wrong.

[4] Disclose.

[5] *Genesis and Exodus*.—Morris, *Specimens of Early English*, Part i. p. 161.

On the other hand, in *Cursor Mundi*, a Northumbrian poem of the early years of the fourteenth century, we find ourselves in company with an author more nearly approaching the quality of Cædmon and Layamon, who, having become acquainted with a new range of ideas, is resolved to make them subject to his own genius. Men in these latter days—so he tells his audience in a prologue—are delighted with romances about Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Greece, Troy, Brutus, Arthur, Gawain, Tristram and Iseult, and the stories of profane love to which they listen produce an evil effect. The best love is the love of the Virgin Mary, in whose honour he proposes to tell the story of the World from a religious point of view.

Efter hali kirkes state
This ilke boke is translate,
Unto Engliss tung to rede
For the luue of englijs lede,
Englis lede of meri ingeland,
For the comen to untherstand.
Frenkis rimes here I rede
Comunli in ilka stede;
That is most made for frankis men.
Quat helpis him that none can cen?
Of ingeland the naciune
Er Englijs men in comune,
The speche that men may mast wid spede
Mast to speke thar-wid war nede;
Seldom was for ani chance
Englis tong preched in France:
Gif we thaim ilkan their language
And than do we na utretage.[1]

Though dealing with a sacred subject, the poet has availed himself, in every direction, of the spirit of romance which had fascinated the imagination of mankind, and has composed his religious history of the world in a mood

[1] This book is translated according to the state of holy Church, to read in the English tongue, for the love of English people, English people of merry England, for the better understanding of the commons. French rhymes I commonly read here in every place, mostly made for Frenchmen. How does that help him that does not know French? English men are commonly of the English nation. It is necessary to speak that speech which may be most readily understood. English tongue was seldom for any purpose used in France: let us give to each their language, and then we do no outrage.—*Cursor Mundi* (Morris), 231.

precisely like that in which Benoît de Ste. More composed his *Roman de Troie.* He presses into his service romantic science, borrowed from the *Secretum Secretorum*, and Alexander of Neckham's *De Naturis Rerum;* romantic sacred legend, found in Peter de Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Aurea Legenda;* romantic religious allegory, from the model furnished by Robert Grosseteste in his *Chasteau d'Amour;* and romantic religious history, from the *Gospel of Nicodemus.* Distant events and persons are brought into familiar relations with the reader by the use of the terms and titles of chivalry: thus the poet speaks of "Sir Pilate," "Sir Caiaphas," and even of "Sir Judas." The entire story is told with a freshness and naïveté that prove the writer to be a genuine descendant of Cædmon, though breathing the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. The following extract is a rendering of the passage from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* describing the descent into hell[1]:—

While that helle and prince Saton
Made to-gedyr this mornyng mone,
There come a stevyn as thonder-blast,
A gostly voys crying fast,
Ye princes off helle; undoth your gate,
The king of blisse woll have in-late.
When helle this herd it seid anon,
Do now go hen fro me, Saton;
A faint fyghter methink art thou;
How wylt thou fight with Jesu now?
With that yaf helle yt-selfe abraide,
And cast out tho Satan, and seid
To his wyckyd workes samen,
Spere your yates, this is no gamen;
Your brasyn yates spere you welle,
And byndyth hem with barres of stele;

[1] While Hell and Prince Satan made together their mournful moan, there came a sound as a thunder-blast, a ghostly voice crying strongly, "Ye princes of hell, undo your gate: the King of bliss will have entrance." When Hell heard this it said anon, "Go now hence from me, Satan, a faint fighter art thou, methinks! How wilt thou now fight with Jesus?" With that Hell started up and cast out Satan, and said to his wicked works together, "Close your gates, this is no game: your brazen gates close you well, and bind them with bars of steel. Force yourselves with might and main to stand stoutly against Him, lest ye with all those that we would not be taken into the keeping of other men."—*Cursor Mundi* (Morris), 18,074.

Enforsyth you with might and mayne
Stalworthely to stond ayen,
Ar ye with alle tho that we ne wold
Bytake in other mennys hold.

While the author of the *Cursor Mundi* was thus importing into religious history the spirit and imagery of romance, the alchemy of Norman poetry was also transmuting the metrical homily, an ancient and favourite form of Saxon art, and one which most readily accommodated itself to the understanding of the people. It is true that Richard Rolle of Hampole, a pious hermit of Yorkshire, in his *Pricke of Conscience*, and William de Shoreham, a Kentish vicar, in his *Seven Sacraments*, preserved in their compositions that strictly hortatory form of instruction which prevails in the more ancient homilies.[1] But in the *Cycle of Homilies* the method of the *Ormulum* —which confined itself to paraphrasing the Gospel for the day with the usual addition of an allegorical interpretation— is modified to suit the taste of the times by the insertion of anecdotes, taken from Lives of the Saints and from other quarters, which illustrate the remarks of the preacher.[2] These tales were at first almost exclusively religious in their aim as in their origin, but the attractions of the *fabliau* having been once recognised, the practice rapidly extended itself, till in the *Handlyng Synne* of Robert of Brunne we find that the spirit of the trouvère is scarcely less strong than that of the homilist.

Robert Mannyng, a canon of the Gilbertine order and a monk in the Priory of Sempringham, was born some time in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and died about A.D. 1340. He has himself informed us of the date of the composition of his *Handlyng Synne*.[3] He has also recorded the motive of his work :—

[1] For the former, see Mr. Morris's edition (1863); for the latter, *Early English Poetry* (Percy Society, vol. 28).

[2] See the account given of this work in Ten Brink's *Early English Literature* (H. M. Kennedy's translation), p. 290. I have not myself seen it.

[3] Dane Felyp was mayster that tyme
That y began thys Englyssh ryme;
The yeres of grace fyl than to be
A thousynd and thre hundrede and thre.
*Handlyng Synne*, Prologue, 73.

That may be weyl on Englysshe tolde,
To telle yow that y may be bolde,
For lewde men y undyrtoke
On Englysshe tunge to make thys boke.
For many ben of swych manere
That talys and rymys will blethly here;
Yn gamys and festys and at the ale
Love men to listen troteuale,[1]
That may falle ofte to vylanye,
To dedly synne or other folye;
For swyche men have I made thes ryme,
That they may wel dyspende here tyme;
And there yn somewhat for to here,
To leve al swyche foul manere,
And for to kunne knowe therynne,
That they wene no synne be ynne.[2]

The original text on which Mannyng based his "Englyssh" composition was the *Manuel des Pechiez* of William of Wadington, who had himself obtained much of his matter from the Latin *Liber Floreti* (attributed to Jean de Garlande, a French or Anglo-Norman versifier of the eleventh century), and who, after the fashion of the times, protested that he had strictly followed his authority.[3] He might with more justice, had it suited him, have claimed the credit of invention, for the tales with which he enlivens his *Manuel* are an addition of his own. Mannyng treats Wadington's text with equal freedom, preserving his author's doctrinal framework—a homily on the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Seven Sacraments—but altering, omitting, or replacing, the illustrative stories, as it suits his purpose. His own tales are very quaint and entertaining, and it may readily be imagined that, when the dryness of the discourse caused the audience to become drowsy, their flagging attention would have been aroused by

[1] Idle tale. It looks as if the word should be "trovetale," *i.e.* trouvère's tale. The *v* and *t* have been transposed.

[2] And to know those kind of tales that they see to have no sin in them.

[3] Rien del mien ni mettrai
Fors sicum jeo apris le ay,
Nule faucine ni trovorez
Plus volunters le lisez.
William de Wadington,
Prologe del *Manuel des Pechiez*, 59.

an anecdote on a level with their barbarous simplicity.[1] He shows considerable skill in weaving his stories into his sermon. For example, when treating of the Deadly Sin of Pride, he observes that one kind of pride, frequently found in women, is love of dress; and to illustrate this, he tells a story of two monks who once met two women with long trains, on each of which (invisible to the wearers) was perched a devil, who, when the women's "tails" were turned towards the monks, tumbled into the dirt.[2] Sloth is a sin which shows itself by excessive devotion to various kinds of popular amusement. Tournaments in particular are to be avoided: they give occasion for all the deadly sins.[3] Minstrelsy is not to be indulged in without self-restraint. Once upon a time a minstrel presented himself before a bishop and greatly disturbed him whilst devoutly engaged in saying grace. The prelate, who apparently foresaw the consequences of this deadly sin, put no check upon the untimely mirth of the musician, but, when the latter turned to go out of the house, a stone fell on his head and crushed him.[4] This story, says the pious Robert, I tell for the good of gleemen. As to the sin of sacrilege, this is frequently committed by those who dance in churchyards during divine service. Let such people take warning by what happened to twelve foolish revellers, who committed this sin while the priest was performing mass. Being requested by the latter to refrain, they were so far from complying that they induced his daughter to join them in the dance, whereupon the good man wished that they might go on dancing for a twelvemonth, or as the Latin, from which Robert took his story, says, for ever. This fate actually overtook all the party, including the daughter, and the punishment was so exemplary, that the emperor Henry crossed the sea to witness the remarkable sight.[5] In the *Handlyng Synne*, in short, the reader may still breathe the same atmosphere that inspired the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great; but he will also detect the presence of an element

[1] See, for example, "The Tale of the Witch and her Bag that Sucked Cows," *Handlyng Synne* (Furnivall), p. 16.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 110.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 145.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 148.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 280.

that prepares him for the transition to the style of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; from which point he may travel by easy stages to the plots of the Elizabethan dramatists.

Robert of Brunne was the author of another work which, in a different way, forms an equally distinct landmark in English poetry. The first of the English poetical fabulists, he may be regarded as the last of the English poetical historians; and his *Chronicle* deserves honourable mention as an example of a class of literature that exercised a powerful influence in fusing the conflicting elements, out of which arose the unity of the English nation. Here too we find our starting point in the Latin language and the Latin Church. The great historical movement in this country begins with the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede, which connects the history of England with the Chronicle of the World by the episode of the Saxon Conquest. In later times the Celtic patriotism of the pseudo-Nennius altered the lines of true history, by blending with Bede's matter of fact the fabulous version of the History of Britain. This again, as we have already seen, furnished Geoffrey of Monmouth with the germs of his Latin romance, which the Norman Wace, proud of the great traditions of the land conquered by his countrymen, reduced to prosaic French verse, thereby inspiring the more imaginative Layamon with a new theme for Saxon minstrelsy. Thus, in the neutral history of "Britain," the two great races occupying the English soil began, through their poets and chroniclers, to be drawn towards each other by a common sentiment of patriotism. To the idea of British nationality, constantly coloured with added details by the local patriotism of monkish historians, — Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, and Simon of Durham,—fresh life was given, during the reigns of John and Henry III., both by the loss of Normandy, and by the alliance between the Norman barons and the Saxon commons, in the cause of constitutional liberty.

The first effects of these various influences on English poetry—if poetry it can be called—are seen in the *Chronicle* usually assigned to Robert of Gloucester.

Of the author of this work nothing is certainly known, beyond the fact that his name was Robert, and that he was alive at the time of the battle of Evesham, since he records as an eyewitness the great darkness which, when that battle was being fought, overspread the country for thirty miles around.[1] A kind of mythology afterwards grew up round the name of a writer so venerable. Browne in his *Britannia's Pastorals* refers to "aged Robert" as one of the early sources of English poetry ;[2] and, Anthony à Wood having discovered a Robert of Gloucester who was a student of Oxford in the reign of Henry III., Thomas Hearne pleased his fancy by identifying this person with the Chronicler, and by imagining the particular house at which he must have lodged during his course at the university.[3] As the dialect of the *Chronicle*, and the allusion in it mentioned above, prove it to have been written by some native of the Gloucestershire district, it would be mere pedantry to quarrel with Hearne's pleasing fable.

Robert opens his work with a description of England, vividly illustrating what has been said of the growth of patriotic feeling in the country, and which may also be taken as a good sample of his style :—

Engelond his a wel god lond · ich wene ech londe best ·
Iset in the on end of the · worlde as al in the west ·
The se geth him al aboute · he stond as in an yle ·
Of fon hii they dorre the lasse doute—bot hit be thorȝ gyle ·
Of folc of the sulve lond · as me hath iseye ȝwile ·
From southe to north he is long · eiȝte hondred mile ·
And tuo hondred mile brod · from est to west to wende ·
Amid the lond as hit be · and noȝt as bi the on ende ·
Plente me may in Engelond · of alle gode ise ·
Bote volc hit vorgulte · other ȝeres the worse be ·
Vor Engelond is vol inoȝ · of frut and ek of tren ·
Of wodes and of parkes · that joye hit is to sen ·
Of foweles and of bestes · of wilde and tame also ·
Of salt fichȝ and eke verss · of vaire riuers there to ·
Of wellen suete and cold inouȝ · of lesen and of mede ·
Of seluer or and of gold · of tyn and eke of lede ·

[1] *Chronicle*, vv. 11,746-49. See the careful preface to Mr. Aldis Wright's edition, p. xi.

[2] A shepherd that began sing o'er
The lay which aged Robert sung of yore.—Bk. ii. song 4.

[3] Hearne's preface to Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, p. lxxvi.

Of stel of yre and of bras · of god corn gret won ·
Of wit and of wolle god · betere ne may be non ·
Wateres he hath ek inouȝ · ac at uore alle othere thre ·
Out of the lond into the se · armes as thei it be ·
ȝware bi the ssipes mowe come · fram the se and wende.
And bring alonde good inoȝ · aboute in eche ende.[1]

Like his Latin predecessors Robert loves local and antiquarian details, and dwells with interest on the features of the different parts of the country he describes. He is faithful to historic precedent also in recording the "Mirabilia" of the country, which, according to his version, are the warm waters of Bath, Stonehenge, and the underground blasts coming up through the Peak Cavern. When he has recited these, together with the names of the four great Roman roads, he returns to the praises of England and its inhabitants :—

So clene lond is Engelond · and so cler withouten hore,
The veireste men in the world · ther inne beth ibore,
So clene and vair and pur ȝwit · among other men hii beth,
That me knoweth hem in eche lond · bi seȝte thar me hem seth ·
So clene is al so that lond · and mannes blood so pur ·
That the gret evel ne cometh naȝt ther · that me clupeth that holi fur ·
That vorfreteth menne limes · riȝt as it were ibrende ·
Ac men of ffrance in thulke vuel · sone ne sueth amende
ȝif hii beth ibroȝt in to Engelond · ȝware thorȝ me may iwite
That Engelond is londe best · as it is iwrite.[2]

[1] England is a very good land ; I judge the best of all lands, set in the one end of the world, in the extreme west. The sea goes all round it ; it stands as in an island : they need have no fears of foes save through the treachery of the folk of the same land, as has formerly been seen. From south to north it is eight hundred miles long, and two hundred miles broad, to go from east to west, that is taking the land in the middle and not at the one end. Plenty of all goods may be seen in England except the people forfeit them, or years be worse : for England is full enough of fruit and of trees, of woods and of parks that it is joy to see ; of fowls and of beasts, alike wild and tame ; of fish salt and fresh ; of fair rivers besides ; enough of wells sweet and cold ; of pastures and meadows ; of silver ore and gold ; of tin and also of lead ; of steel, of iron, and of brass ; of good corn great abundance, of wheat, and of good wool none can be better. It has also enough of waters, and three above all others, like arms running out of the land into the sea, whereby the ships may come from the sea and return to it, and bring ashore goods enough bought at each end.—Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 1-22.

[2] So clean a land is England and so clear without dirt, the fairest men in the world are born therein ; so clean, and fair, and pure white are they among other men that they may be known in each land wherever they are seen. So clean is also that land and man's blood so pure, that the great evil may not come there that is called holy fire, that wastes men's limbs as if

After specifying the Seven Ages of the World, Robert begins his narrative, following for the most part the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but frequently referring to Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury, and possibly borrowing details from Wace and Layamon.[1] He is, however, by no means a mere transcriber. Besides the industry he shows in consulting the best authorities, he takes a real interest in his subject on its moral side, and his reflections have often great significance, as showing the feelings of the native English towards the Norman conquerors. Here, for example, is his judgment on the downfall of the Saxon dynasty:—

"Thus the English folk came to the ground for nought, for a false king having no right to the kingdom, and came to a new lord, whose right was greater: but neither of them, as may be seen, was entirely in the right; and thus was that land, I wis, brought into Norman's hand; so that it is a great chance if there is ever a recovery of it. The high men that be in England are of the Normans, and the low men of the Saxons, as I understand, so that ye see on either side what right ye have to it. But I understand that it was done by God's will. For while the men of this land were pure heathens, no land and no people were in arms against them. But afterwards the people received Christianity, and kept but for a little while the commandments they had received, and turned to sloth and to pride, and to lechery, and to gluttony, and high men much to robbery; and it was as the spirits said in a vision to St. Edward, how there should come such misery into England on account of the robbery of high men and the fornication of clerks, and how God should send sorrow into this kingdom between Michaelmas and St. Luke on St. Calixtus day."[2]

It is evident that the chronicler intends his con-

they were burned. But men of France in that evil soon obtain a remedy if they be brought into England; whereby may be known that England is the best of lands as hath been written.—Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 180-88.

[1] Mr. Wright doubts whether Robert owed anything to Wace and Layamon.—Preface to *Chronicle*, pp. xiv., xv.

[2] Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 7495-7514.

temporaries to learn a lesson from the judgment of God on the Saxon nation. He sees, too, the punishing hand of Heaven in the fate that befell the descendants of the Conqueror.

"Game of hounds and of wild beasts he loved well, and his forest and his woods, and the New Forest most of all, which is in Southamptonshire, for this he loved well, and stored full of beasts and pastures with great wrong, for he cast out of house and home a great multitude of men, and took their land for thirty miles and more thereabout, and made it forest and pastures for the beasts to feed on; he took little heed of the poor men he disinherited. Therefore therein befell much mischief, and his son was shot in it, William the red king; and also his only son named Richard met his death there; and Richard his only nephew broke his neck there as he rode a-hunting, and his horse chanced to kick. To such misadventure turned the wrong done to poor men."[1]

Robert of Brunne finished his *Chronicle* in 1338. He was a less original historian than Robert of Gloucester, and was content for the most part to translate with some closeness from Wace's *Brut*, and from the *Chronicle* of Peter de Langtoft, which is written in French. His motive, however, in making the translation was poetical, or at any rate popular—

Als thai haf wryten and sayd
Haf I alle in myn Inglis layd,
In symple speche as I couthe,
That is lightest in mennes mouthe.
I made noght for no disours,
Ne for no seggours, no harpours,
Bot for the luf of symple men
That strange Inglis can not ken;
For many it ere that strange Inglis
In ryme wate never what it is,
And bot thai wist what it mente
Ellis me thoght it were alle schente.[2]

[1] Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 7698-7711.

[2] And unless they knew what it meant I thought my labour would be all wasted.—Prologue to Mannyng's *Chronicle*.

Robert of Gloucester is an antiquarian and a moralist first, a poet only by accident; but Mannyng's main interest is in the story, and the more fabulous this is—provided alway it has the semblance of authority—the better he is pleased. He accepts as history, for example, the legend of Guy of Warwick, and is much more willing than Wace to believe all the marvels that Geoffrey of Monmouth relates of Arthur. Thus, Wace having expressed himself with a little scepticism in a line or two on this subject, Robert breaks out:—

Al ys nought soth ne nought al lye,
Ne al wysdam ne al folye.
Ther nys no thyng of hym seyd
That hit ne may be to godnesse leyd.
More[1] than othere were his dedes
That men of hym so mykil redes.
Ne were his dedes hadde be writen[2]
Of hym no thyng men scholde have wyten.[3]
Geffrey Arthur of Monemu
He wrot his dedes that were of pru,[4]
And blamed both Gildas and Bede,
Why they wolde nought of hym rede,
Sin he bar the pris of alle Cristen kynges,
And write so lytel of his preysinges,
And more worschip of him spoke ther was
That of any of tho that spekes Gildas,
Or of any that Bede wrot,
Save holy men that we wot.
In alle landes wrot men of Arthur,
Hys noble dedes of honur;
In ffrance men wrot and yit men wryte
But herd have we of hym but lyte.
Therefore of hym more men fynd
In farre bookes, als ys kynd,[5]
Than we have in thys lond
That we have, ther men hit fond.[6]
Till Domesday men schalle spelle,
And of Arthures dedes talke and telle.[7]

Taken in connection with the prologue to the *Cursor Mundi* this passage is exceedingly significant, for it shows that the genius of the romances, which had fired

[1] Greater. [2] And if it were not that his deeds had been written.
[3] Known. [4] Valour. [5] As is natural.
[6] Than we have in this land of ours where men invented it.
[7] *Chronicle* of Robert of Brunne, 10,587-10,614.

the imagination of the Normans, had as yet scarcely touched the Saxon mind. It was natural that it should be so. The Saxons for the most part had remained outside the system of chivalry; they had taken little part in the Crusades, and were consequently strangers to the passion for knight-errantry which these engendered. The few English metrical romances of this period—such as *Sir Tristram* and the later *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*—though the subjects are English, are invariably translated from the French. Two legends of an earlier date, *The Song of Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, are possible (though I think very doubtful) exceptions; but Mannyng's observations on the latter poem show how little the English writers of the time appreciated either the spirit of romance or the facts of history. For a time he believed it to be history, but when he found that the elder chroniclers had made no mention of it, he treated the tale as a fable. Though he supposed Gunter, the father of Havelok, to be a contemporary of Alfred, he looked for a mention of Havelok's story in Gildas and Bede![1]

The first part of Mannyng's *Chronicle*, in which he closely follows Wace, is written in octosyllabic verse; in the second, where Langtoft is his original, he employs Alexandrines often rhyming in the middle, as well as at the end, of the verse. It is interesting to compare the following passage, which may serve as a sample of his second manner, with Robert of Gloucester's reflections already cited on the same subject:—

> Allas! for Sir Harald, for him was mykelle reuth,
> Full well his awen suld hald, if he had kept his treuth.
> Bot that he was forsuorn, mishappyng therefor he fond;
> Suld he never els haf lorn for William no lond,
> Ne bien in that bondage, that brouht was over the se;
> Now ere thei in seruage fulle fele that or was fre.
> Our fredom that day for ever toke the leve,
> For Harald it went away, his falshood did us greve.[2]

[1] Hearne's edition of Langtoft's *Chronicle*, vol. i. p. 25.

[2] Alas! for Sir Harold, great was the pity for him; full well he might have held his own, if he had kept his word. But since he was forsworn he found therefore misfortune; else had he never lost any land through William, nor been in that bondage that was brought over the sea; now

It will readily be perceived that when Mannyng, departing from his expressed intention of turning his French into "simple Inglis," imitates the *rime entrelacé*, his style becomes necessarily less flowing, and—in consequence of the greater tendency to inversion — more obscure. On the other hand, when compared with Robert of Gloucester, his diction and versification appear wonderfully clear and harmonious. The former, a contemporary of Mannyng, though older, wrote in the south-western dialect, which still retained a respect for the literary standards established in the language by Alfred. Unaffected by the infusion of new elements of race and speech, which in the north and east were causing such havoc in Anglo-Saxon grammar, the descendants of the men of Wessex continued to employ an archaic vocabulary and forms of inflection and pronunciation which were elsewhere falling into disuse. Nor were they quick in adapting themselves to foreign models. Robert of Gloucester indeed evidently intends to imitate French Alexandrines. But he must have had a bad ear, for in the second line of his *Chronicle* he throws the accent before the cæsura on the word "the," and the movement of his verse is, as a rule, painfully lame. He scarcely ever uses French words, whereas both Robert of Brunne and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, as may be seen from the foregoing extracts, introduce them frequently, especially for the purposes of rhyme.

Nevertheless though the northern poets had done so much to modernise their language, and to naturalise foreign metrical forms, their rhythms were as yet far from attaining the smoothness of the French iambic movement. In framing their "simple speech" to suit either the measure of four accents or the Alexandrine verse, they were contented to produce a rhyming couplet, each line of which had the proper number of accents, without regard to the number of syllables. The triple

are they in serfage full many who were once free. Our freedom that day for ever took its leave; it went away on Harold's account; his falsehood did us injury.

movement is frequent in their octosyllabic verse, and on the other hand many of their lines have only seven syllables. This characteristic is mainly due to the suppression of the final *e* in the northern dialect, which caused the number of monosyllabic words in the language constantly to multiply. In this respect the southern dialect bore a closer analogy than the northern to the French language, and we may observe that the verse of four accents, in the hands of an artist like the author of *The Hule and the Nightingale*, approaches on the whole—in spite of an obsolete vocabulary and difficult syntax—nearer to the style of Chaucer, than when it is used by Robert of Brunne.

As a whole the movement described in this chapter may be summed up as follows: Natural decline, attendant upon a settled state of society, had operated, together with the spirit of Christianity, to depress the art of oral minstrelsy, which was the offspring of the primitive manners of the Anglo-Saxons, and which had been embodied in their language while it preserved its inflected form. No harvest of original genius followed the system of literary culture introduced by Alfred. But the Norman Conquest brought the people into acquaintance with Continental thought and art, and inspired imitation, both among those who were ambitious to use the Anglo-Saxon for the purposes of literature, and those who retained something of the spirit of the Teutonic minstrel. At the same time the steady disappearance, in the common speech, of grammatical inflections, owing to the intercourse between so many different races, had prepared the language for the reception of new rhythmical movements, and had made it easy for the native poets to adapt it to the literary models presented to them by the Norman immigrants.

# CHAPTER V

## THE EARLY RENAISSANCE: ITS EFFECTS ON LITERATURE IN ITALY, FRANCE, AND ENGLAND

THE Normans, by naturalising French literature in England, made the newly formed English language an instrument for expressing the thought of a widely extended society. Up to the middle of the thirteenth century European poetry may be said to possess a universal character. Whether composed in Latin or in any of the infant vernacular tongues, the thoughts embodied in it—scientific, devotional, sentimental, or romantic—are completely free from all traces of local or national colouring. When an Englishman or a Frenchman writes a Bestiary, he is, in each case, sure to describe in it the attributes of the panther, and to inform his readers that the animal's sweet breath makes him a type of the Saviour. A poetical moralist, whatever be his tongue, wishing to dwell on the vanity of earthly things, will certainly draw some of his ideas from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ;* and the poetical homilist will be under like obligations to Gregory the Great. Love poetry composed by the troubadours of Provence is intelligible to the knights of the German castles; and the tales of Lancelot and Guenevere, or Tristram and Iseult, written perhaps beyond the English Channel, are read on the shores of Rimini.[1]

European poetry presents this universal character

[1] See the story of Francesca da Rimini in Dante's *Inferno*, canto v. 127 :—

Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
Di Lancilotto, come amor lo strinse.

because it reflects the image of a society which still preserves many of the essential features of the universal Roman Empire. Little indeed remained of that great original structure, except in history and poetry, and it may safely be asserted that, in the thirteenth century, no man in Europe understood the principle of the imperial rule of Constantine, in which the Emperor was at once the head, if not of the Church, at least of the established religion of the State; the guardian of the great fabric of order founded on the base of Roman citizenship; the promoter of the encyclopædic system of education inherited from the Greeks. The memory of this vast scheme had been eclipsed by one scarcely less catholic and extensive, but in which the powers of Church and State were no longer united but co-ordinate. In the revived Empire of Charlemagne, though the Emperor was indeed the heir of the Cæsars, and the guardian of what remained of Hellenic civilisation, he had received the imperial crown in trust, not from the Roman Senate and the Roman people, but from the Bishop of Rome, now universally recognised as the head of the Western Church. And not only was Charlemagne head of the Roman Empire, he was also chief of the whole system of Teutonic feudalism, with all its complex hierarchy of duchies, marquisates, and counties, swarming with barbarous ideas and customs, which had flowed around, and almost submerged, the old structure of European civilisation.

Theoretically the constitution of the Empire of Charlemagne is still recognised in the Europe of the fourteenth century, and the order of society groups itself round the allied but rival powers of the Papacy and the Empire. The Pope is now the representative of the unity of Western Christendom. His seat in the imperial city is the centre to which all spiritual causes are referred. As the guardian of the whole system of ecclesiastical education, he can mould the minds of men in every European country. By means of interdict and excommunication, he can make the force of his decrees felt even in the secular affairs of each European kingdom. His

authority is fortified by the logic of the schools, and enforced against schismatic and heretic by the roving armies of the preaching orders.

Theoretically again, in the secular sphere, the authority of the Emperor is as comprehensive as the Pope's in spiritual matters. In his capacity of Emperor of Rome, his power extends over every land embraced within the dominions of the great historic Empire; in his capacity of feudal chief of the barbarian conquerors, he is the military head and suzerain of all the kings who derive from Charlemagne authority to represent him in the various parts of his dominions, as his counts and lieutenants.

Such was the theory of European order at the time from which this history of English poetry takes its departure. In its outward application it was still clothed with a certain show of pomp and pageantry. And the best way of measuring how far the time-honoured instrument of government, and the corresponding moulds of catholic thought, were adapted to the actual wants of mankind, is to watch the imperial system at work. The student, who wishes to form in his mind an image of feudal Europe in the fourteenth century, may observe all the vital forces of the time brought picturesquely before him at the Diet of Coblenz, held, in 1338, on the very eve of the Hundred Years' War between France and England.

"Two thrones," says a French historian, describing the scene, "were erected in the market-place, before the church of Saint Castor; on the more elevated sat the Emperor, on the other King Edward; around them 17,000 men-at-arms—Germans, Brabançons, Hollanders, Walloons, and English—crowded the market-place, the streets of the town, and the banks of the river. The Emperor held in his right hand the sceptre, in his left the globe, emblem of the empire of the world, and a German knight raised a naked sword above his head. A clerk read the constitution by which the Diet of Frankfort had vindicated the independence of the imperial crown against the pretensions of the Pope; then Edward rose and prayed the Emperor and the princes

of the Empire to aid him to have justice against Philip of Valois, who was unjustly detaining from him both the ancient possessions of the Plantagenets and the crown of France itself. Louis received the request of Edward as a suzerain from whom justice is demanded, and further accused Philip of felony on his own account, inasmuch as Philip had refused him homage for the fiefs which he held of the Empire. . . . The Emperor, on the advice of the great vassals, declared Philip to be deprived of all right to the protection of the Empire, and conferred on King Edward the title of Imperial Vicar for seven years in all the provinces on the left bank of the Rhine, investing him also with military command, and all the rights of sovereignty, including even that of coining money."[1]

Here, under cover of a splendid pageant, we see advanced pretensions of the most venerable antiquity; a protest against the claim of the Pope to bestow the possession of the Roman Empire; the claim of the Emperor to be the over-lord of all the kings of the world; the recognition of the Feudal System as part of the law of Europe. And yet life had ebbed so swiftly from each of these great forces in Church and State, that the clerks, if they were shrewd men, must have smiled as they proclaimed the sounding principles. Had the Diet indeed been held a century earlier, there might have been some meaning in a protest against the claims of the Papacy to paramount authority. Then the triumph of Hildebrand over the Emperor Henry IV. would have still lingered in men's memories, and they would have recalled how recently Innocent III. had released the subjects of John in England from their allegiance, and in France had humbled the pride of Philip Augustus. But the Popes, in the pursuit of their temporal interests, had long ago impaired the operation of their spiritual power; by aiming at supremacy in Italy they had lost their world-wide dominion; at the time of the Diet of Coblenz the Pope was a dependant of the

[1] Translated from H. Martin's *Histoire de France*, vol. v. p. 41 (edition of 1855).

French king at Avignon; heresy had sprung up in the heart of one of the great orders on which his authority so largely rested; the spiritual influence of the Holy See had been weakened by the most flagrant venality. The power of the Emperor was even more infirm, for while his title to be the successor of the Cæsars was recognised to rest upon a figment, he lacked the strength to support his acknowledged rights as the elected chief of the Feudal System. The vassal whom he had declared to be "deprived of the protection of the Empire" had contemptuously ignored his authority; the vassal who had appealed to his supreme tribunal had indignantly declined to render him the external marks of homage.

The Feudal System itself under a superficial splendour veiled an extreme decrepitude. It still appealed with a strong religious sanction to some of the noblest instincts in human nature, the mutual obligations between superior and inferior, and the duties of the strong to the weak. By the honour also which it paid to the virtue of courtesy, and by its respect for women, it had done much to establish a noble and gentle code of manners, which was reflected in the literature of the period. But, being the natural offspring of tribal institutions, it was ill adapted to promote the ends of civil society. Even if it could have been held together by a succession of strong rulers like Charlemagne, the rights of inheritance, which must have grown up in spite of the central government, with the spirit of lawlessness encouraged by local independence and private war, would have effectually checked the growth of any system of legal order. The fervour of religious zeal united for a time the warring atoms of feudalism in a succession of Crusades. But as these were wanting altogether in definite purpose, and amounted to little more than an exodus of tribal leaders from west to east, their sole lasting effect was to increase the anarchy, and weaken the power, of the system in the various countries of Europe.

If the Diet of Coblenz presents a brilliant image of the external splendour of feudalism, which was indeed

never more striking than at this period, it is not less eloquent in the silence with which it passes over the forces that were actually at work in the heart of society. The ideas of local patriotism and of civil liberty find no place in the deliberations of its members. Though it was the preface to a war which lasted for nearly a hundred years, and affected the fortunes and interests of two great nations, it regarded the quarrel between the kings of England and France precisely as if it were a dispute between rival landlords about their respective rights over a manor. The picturesque assemblage of so many nationalities—"Germans, Brabançons, Hollanders, Walloons, and English"—seems to resemble the levies from so many roving tribes, rather than from peoples, of whom some had established the Hanseatic League, others had successfully asserted their municipal liberties against their feudal lords, and others again had furnished their king with supplies for the conduct of the war by the vote of their elected representatives. Of the bankers of Florence who trusted too blindly to the credit of Edward, of the woollen manufacturers of Flanders whose interests had been injured by the encroachments of Philip, no notice is taken. Yet it was from this class of men, always silently growing in wealth and power, that a new order of things was being formed amidst the all-embracing envelope of Catholicism and Feudalism, which, already weakened by the schism in the Papacy, was in the course of the next century and a half to be completely shattered; in France by the fields of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt; in England by the Civil Wars of the Roses.

But while the great and growing movement of civil life was thus ignored in the pageantry of the period, it was rapidly finding outward expression in art and literature. Art, indeed, in spite of the decay of its ancient principles, had never ceased to employ its resources in facilitating the transition of thought from Paganism to Christianity. Architecture had shown the way by adapting the forms of the basilica to the uses of the Church. St. Ambrose and St. Gregory had proved how fine an

instrument was the Latin language for the purposes of church music. The painter had sought to express the elementary truths of religion, at first by means of signs and symbols, afterwards through such stiff imitations of nature as could be produced by the conventionalism of Byzantine art; and from these rude beginnings Giotto, inspired by the life of the Italian cities, had learned to cover the walls of the churches with representations of Scripture history full of movement and meaning. By a somewhat different road, the gleeman or jongleur, in his endeavour to fit the composite vernacular tongues of Europe to the requirements of minstrelsy and music, had provided men with a vocabulary and syntax adequate for the expression of philosophic thought in prose or verse.

After the invention of this metrical instrument, variety was soon introduced into the conventional catholicity of literary composition. Towards the close of the thirteenth century, literature in every European country, or at least in the three in which thought was most active—Italy, France, and England—began to exhibit three leading characteristics: (1) A general recognition of the authoritative theory of life in Church and State; (2) An equally widespread sense that this theory was not working in harmony with the actual requirements of human society; (3) An attempt to give expression in the vernacular speech to the thoughts awakened by the sense of discord. From the joint operation of these conflicting impulses arose the complex movement generally known as the Renaissance.

"The Renaissance" is a phrase at once misleading and obscure. It seems in itself to mean "new birth." But by some writers it is employed to signify a new-born spirit of revolt against the trammels of ecclesiastical authority and tradition, while others use it in a more restricted sense, as indicating a freshly awakened interest in the principles of classical literature, which had been allowed to slumber through the darkness of the Middle Ages. Neither of these definitions, however, can be said to cover all the facts of the case. For on the one hand

the pioneers of the movement were the Schoolmen, who were also the most powerful defenders of the authority of the Church; and on the other, the stream of classical culture, however feeble and shrunken in volume, had never entirely ceased to flow. The Renaissance was in fact a tendency inherent in the condition of things, and it was promoted from different quarters by the independent action of all the greatest minds of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Amid the ever-increasing anarchy of their times men were forced to reflect on the first principles of order, and naturally turned for counsel to the works of the philosophers who had studied similar problems in the free states of antiquity. Hence, in the philosophy of the Schoolmen, and particularly of St. Thomas Aquinas, we find a revival of that political education which, as has been already shown, was overlaid, in the decline of the Roman Empire, by the encyclopædic education of Alexandria. A profound study of the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle awoke new and general interest in political science; a little later the *History* of Livy, and the Letters, Speeches, and Philosophical Dialogues of Cicero, enabled the mind to view objects in the past in better perspective and proportion; so that, though the historic sense was still in its infancy, men were becoming dimly aware of their relationship to the citizens of Greece and Rome. By some the ideas derived from their new studies were thrown into the logical form natural to them from their scholastic training; others expressed their emotions in lyrical verse; and others again, of a more lively or less reflective turn, imitated directly the objects immediately before their eyes. But they all wrote in their native tongues, and accordingly, while the Renaissance allied itself everywhere with the cause of political liberty, it at the same time developed the separate life of every European nation, by perfecting the structure of each national language.

There was indeed as yet nothing like a national literature in any European country. All writers shared in the

ideas and sentiments derived from the universal social framework. What was produced by a great poet in one vernacular tongue was read in every other part of the European Commonwealth, and suggested some imaginative design or metrical experiment to those who were elsewhere struggling, under different circumstances, to subdue to their thought the difficulties of an infant language. The imagination of the feudal world was still fairly homogeneous; Dante and Petrarch easily learned the lessons taught them by their Provençal neighbours; and if we are to understand the work of Chaucer and Langland, we must first observe how the problems of the age were being dealt with by the poets of France and Italy. For the poetry of Chaucer is largely inspired by the works of Dante, of Petrarch, and, above all, of Boccaccio; and though Langland probably knew no modern language but his own, the analogy between the character of his thought and of Dante's is so strong, as to show how general were the forces that unconsciously acted upon the imagination of individual poets, of whatever race and tongue. At this point, therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the effect of the Renaissance on the literatures of the different nations of Europe.

To begin with Italy, which of all the countries of Europe exhibited in the most striking contrast the ruins of former greatness and the wretchedness of existing anarchy. The whole framework of her ancient social order, at least in the country districts, had been swept away by the deluge of Lombard barbarism; and the institutions which had taken root there had developed, as in other parts of Europe, into the fabric of feudalism. Once the seat and centre of universal empire, she was now more completely deprived than any other nation of a central system of government; and all the antagonistic principles, inherent in the Feudal System and in the mediæval scheme of Church and State, had for centuries struggled in her bosom. The conflicting rights of Pope and Emperor; the claims of the latter to absolute authority over her free cities; the quarrel of Guelph and

Ghibelline in the cities themselves; when this ceased, the legacy of faction dividing the aristocratic and democratic parties; the perpetual rivalries of petty and jealous states;—all these evils had embroiled the life of Italy in a wild and hopeless confusion. Civil war necessarily prepared the way for the foreign conqueror, and, since the days of Charles Martel, the soil of Italy had never long been free from the presence of some alien over-lord, called in by one of the rival powers that sought to rule her, to act as her deliverer from another.

In spite of the anarchy by which she was distracted, Italy preserved far more vividly than any other European country the memory of Roman citizenship. Every Italian was proud of Rome, as the centre of the Catholic religion; he was also proud of her, as the centre of Empire, the city in which the Emperor, German barbarian though he might be, received the symbol of his universal authority. At a comparatively early date, the historic cities in the North of Italy had rebuilt their walls which the Lombards had destroyed; and as each community increased in wealth and prosperity, the aspect of the country began to recall once more the picture enshrined in one of the most beautiful lines of Virgil.[1] The growing sense of the value of civic liberty had even inspired many of the cities to unite in common federal action, and by the Lombard League they had maintained their independence against the power of Frederic Barbarossa. The period between the Peace of Constance and the death of Frederic II. is the heroic age in the life of the mediæval Italian cities, strongly resembling the epoch in Greece between the battle of Marathon and the Peloponnesian War. All the energies of the individual were bent on making the life of his city as glorious and beautiful as it was free; and out of this soil of civic liberty sprang the race of great artists who continued to instruct Europe in the principles of beauty long after the political freedom of Italy had perished. Yet the Florentine, the Milanese, and the Pisan of the golden age did not

[1] Virg. *Georg.* ii. 157: "Fluminaque antiquos subterlabentia muros": "The rivers gliding beneath ancient walls."

forget that they were members of a more extended society. If their pride in the external splendour of their native city exceeded that of the provincials celebrated in the *Urbium Nobilium Ordo* of Ausonius, they also valued themselves, like Rutilius, on being citizens of the Roman Empire, and cherished, as if it were part of their own traditions, the memory of the all-conquering Republic.

The renascent idea of Roman citizenship lies at the root of the conception of life formed by the greatest of Italian poets. Dante's study of Aristotle had taught him that man was formed to live in society. "Would it not be the worse for man on earth," he asks, "if he were not a citizen?"[1] He had served his own city too faithfully for happiness, and some of his most beautiful verses set forth the image of the "sober and chaste" Florence before she had suffered the corruption of luxury.[2] After his banishment he carried the same spirit into a larger retrospect, and, almost in the very language of Virgil, describes the simple and manly customs out of which the Roman Republic grew to be "the most glorious of created things": "Thou knowest what it (the Roman ensign) did, borne by the illustrious Romans against Brennus, against Pyrrhus, and against other princes and commonwealths: whence Torquatus and Quinctius, called from his unkempt locks, and the Decii and the Fabii had the fame which I gladly embalm."[3] From the magnanimity, wisdom, and justice of the Roman Republic Dante deduces the right

[1] Or di', sarebbe il peggio
Per l' uomo in terra, se non fosse cive?
*Paradiso*, canto viii. 116.

Compare Aristotle, *Ethics*, i. 7, *φύσει πολιτικὸς ἄνθρωπος*. *Ibid.* ix. 9, *πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ συζῆν πεφυκός*.

[2] Fiorenza dentro dalla cerchia antica,
Ond' ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,
Si stava in pace sobria e pudica.
. . . . .
Bellincion Berti vid' io andar cinto
Di cuoio e d' osso, e venir dallo specchio
La donna sua, senza il viso dipinto:
E vidi quel dei Nerli, e quel del Vecchio
Esser contenti alla pelle scoverta,
E le sue donne al fuso ed al pennecchio.
*Paradiso*, canto xv. 97-117.

[3] *Ibid.* vi. 43.

of universal monarchy inherent in the head of the Holy Roman Empire.

On the other hand his instinct is as strongly opposed to the institutions of feudalism and to the temporal power of the Papacy. In so far indeed as aristocracy is an essential element in the life of a well-ordered city, he shows himself strongly aristocratic, and speaks with vehemence and bitterness of the evils produced by the confusion of ranks, and the interference of the populace in affairs of state.[1] Nor does he deny that great virtues may be reproduced in the successive representatives of a few noble families, but he likens nobility to a cloak which unless it is constantly added to must necessarily be curtailed by time.[2] On the feudal principle of inheritance, which, long established among the Lombard lords of Italy, constituted in the opinion of the vulgar the essence of nobility, he looks with profound contempt, since, as he says, the foundation of riches may have been laid in force and fraud, and their continued possession may be attended with every kind of wretchedness.[3] Moreover the principle of hereditary aristocracy must be based on a belief in the descent of mankind from a multiplicity of families, which is contrary to the doctrine of Scripture.[4] True nobility consists in bringing to perfection the virtues implanted in the human mind by the grace of God.[5] These ethical and civic conceptions of the nature of aristocracy, opposed as they were to the prejudices of the time, made a deep impression on the mind of Dante's more thoughtful contemporaries, and we shall find them hereafter reproduced by more than one English poet, and notably by Chaucer.[6]

Another cause of the universal anarchy of the times, in the judgment of Dante, is the confusion of functions

[1] Sempre la confusion delle persone
Principio fu del mal della cittade,
Come del corpo il cibo che s' appone.
*Paradiso*, xvi. 67.

[2] Ben sei tu manto che tosto raccorce,
Sì che, se non s' appon di die in die,
Lo tempo va dintorno con le force.
*Ibid.* xvi. 7.

[3] *Convito*, iv. c. 11, 12. [4] *Ibid.* iv. 15. [5] *Ibid.* iv. 20.

[6] Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," 1109.

in Church and State. "Man has need," he says, "of a double direction—that is to say of the Supreme Pontiff, whose office is to bring the human race by the light of revelation to eternal life, and of the Emperor, who must direct them to a temporal end by the teaching of philosophy." These two roads are distinct, but powers which ought to be moving parallel to each other have come into collision.[1] Each in the divine order of things is a monarchy ruling in its own proper sphere, and the seat of the spiritual as of the temporal empire is the city of Rome. "Therefore," says Dante, "there should be no need of further question in order to see what a special birth and special direction, conceived and ordained by God, was that of the Holy City. And truly I am firmly of opinion that the very stones that stand in her walls are worthy of reverence; and the soil on which she rests is worthy beyond all that men can utter or feel." [2]

Thus in every direction, in the midst of ecclesiastical feudalism, the mind of Dante seems to fall back on the antique image of Roman citizenship. And yet the civic ideal he had formed was one which could never have been applied as a remedy to the actual evils which he had so accurately gauged. The *Divine Comedy* embodies, not the views of a statesman, nor even the dreams of a poet, so much as the logic of the Schoolman. It moves on parallel lines with the *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is a sustained argument from the unseen to the visible world, from the divine to the human order, presenting a system of life incapable of realisation until the corrupt will of man is brought into conformity with the will of God. Dante would perhaps not have admitted so frankly as Plato that his Republic was not

[1] Soleva Roma, che il buon mondo feo,
Due Soli aver, che l' una e l' altra strada
Facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.
L' un l' altro ha spento; ed è giunta la spada
Col pastorale, e l' un con l' altro insieme
Per viva forza mal convien che vada;
Perocchè, giunti, l' un l' altro non teme.
*Purgatorio*, xvi. 106.

[2] *Convito*, iv. c. 5.

meant for the working world, but though he may have regarded "high Harry"[1] as an instrument of the divine purpose, he can hardly have hoped that the Emperor would prevail with the "malicious and foolish company" with whom he found himself in exile to restore the ideal state of things.[2] His hope is in posterity. "I will not," says his ancestor Caceiaguida to him in Paradise, "that thou envy thy neighbours, since the life that awaits thee in future goes farther than the punishment of their perfidies."[3] The city he conceives is the *Civitas Dei*,—an imperial Rome in which Christ himself is Roman, a spiritual Rome in which Christ is abbot of the cloister.[4] In this lofty allegorical application of spiritual ideas to actual affairs we shall have presently occasion to observe a strong, though probably a fortuitous, likeness between Dante and the English Langland.

Another note of Renaissance made itself heard in the writings of Petrarch. Touching each other as their sympathies did at so many points, it would be difficult to find a more striking contrast between two men of genius than between Petrarch and Dante. Both of them cultivated their studies in solitude, but while Dante had devoted himself, while he could, to the service of his country, and had been forced to prove in exile "how salt was the taste of another's bread," Petrarch, courted and flattered by popes and princes, deliberately declined the duties of active life, and indulged himself by preference in the pleasures of reverie. Both were scholars in the truest sense of the word; but Dante's learning was always directed, as his genius was curbed by a great practical end, "to promote the perfection of human life;"[5] Petrarch loved

[1] *Paradiso*, xvii. 82. [2] *Ibid.* xvii. 62. [3] *Ibid.* xvii. 97.

[4] *Purgatorio*, xxxii. 101—

cive
Di quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano;

and *Ibid.* xxvi. 128—

chiostro
Nel quale è Cristo abate del collegio.

[5] *Convito*, iv. c. 9. Compare

L'ingegno affreno più che non soglio
Perchè non corra che virtù nol guidi.
*Inferno*, xxvi. 21, 22.

and

Più non mi lascia gire il fren dell' arte.

books in themselves and for the enjoyments they furnished to his imagination. They shared a common and noble passion for the regeneration of Italy, but to Dante this was a necessary part of a universal moral system, to Petrarch it was little more than the luxury of inward sentiment.

The political ideas and writings of the latter represent, therefore, a long series of illusions. His brilliant imagination was nourished upon the *literæ humaniores* of Rome, and especially on Cicero, Livy, and Virgil, whom he interpreted, not through the severe medium of the scholastic philosophy, but by his own instinct and sympathy. Thus he found himself in actual touch with the thoughts and sentiments of antiquity, and, amidst the monuments of Roman greatness, fancied that the old Roman spirit was as living a reality to others as to himself. Once in Avignon, meeting some noble Roman ladies who had come there on a pilgrimage, he conversed with them on the state of affairs in the Eternal City. When they left him, "then," says he, "I first perceived where I was. For while the conversation lasted I was at Rome, and seemed to be looking on Cecilia, the wife of Metellus, and Sulpicia, the wife of Fulvius, and Cornelia, the wife of Gracchus, and Martia, the wife of Cato, and Æmilia, the wife of Africanus, and all the long line of illustrious women of old."[1] When the tribune Rienzi became for the moment master of Rome, Petrarch believed his country to be on the eve of a great moral revival, and his emotions broke forth in the beautiful ode beginning "Spirto Gentil"—

L' antiche mura ch' amor teme, ed ama
E trema mondo, quando si rimembra
Del tempo andato, e indietro si rivolve ;
E i sassi dove fur chiuse le membra
Di lui che non saranno senza fama
S' il universo pria non si dissolve ;
E tutto quel ch' una ruina involve,
Per te spera saldar ogni suo vizio.
O grandi Scipioni, o fedel Bruto,
Quanto v' aggrada, se gia è amor, venuto
Romor laggiù del ben locato uffizio ;

[1] *Epistolæ Familiares*, lib. xvi. 8.

Com' era che Fabbrizio
Si facea lieto, udendo la novella,
E dice, "Roma mia sarà ancor bella."[1]

The hollowness of Rienzi's pretensions was soon exposed, yet Petrarch showed his generosity by not forsaking him after his fall, and, cherishing the idea that the rabble of Rome were the true descendants of the men who, after the battle of Cannæ, thanked Varro for not having despaired of the Republic, he addressed to the Roman people one of his usual manifestoes entreating them to interfere in behalf of their tribune. The opening of the letter is pathetic in its absurdity: "Apud te quidem, invictissime domitorque terrarum, Populе meus, apud te clam paucis res magna tractanda est." He proceeds:—

"Your power, I well know, is diminished; but, believe me, if any drop of your ancient blood remains, you have still no small majesty, no light influence. Venture something, I adjure you, by the memory of human affairs, by the ashes and glory of your ancestors, by the mercy of Jesus Christ, who bids us love our neighbour and succour the afflicted. Venture something, I beseech you, above all for that which honour bids you strive for, and which you cannot leave in silence without shame and dishonour; and even if not for his safety, at least for your own reputation, venture something if you would remain anything. I tell you plainly that if you are timid, if you despise yourselves, many will also despise you, none will respect you. . . . Only do so much as to open your mouths with one consent; let the world see that the Roman people speak with one voice. No man will anywhere treat *that* with ridicule or scorn; every man will listen

[1] The ancient walls that love venerates, and the world loves and trembles at, when it remembers the time that is gone, and revolves the past; and the stones wherein are enclosed the members of those who shall not be without glory until the world itself dissolve, and all that is now involved in one ruin, hopes through thee to heal itself of its every disease. O great Scipios, O faithful Brutus, how pleasing to you, if love is still yours, must be the rumour, that has come to you in your world, of office well bestowed! how must Fabricius have rejoiced, hearing the news, and have said, "My Rome shall yet be beautiful!"

to it with reverence and awe. Demand to have the captive back, or at least demand justice for him; one of these two things will be granted to you. And as you formerly, merely by sending a small embassy, delivered the king of Egypt when besieged by the Syrians, so now deliver your own citizen from his undeserved imprisonment." [1]

Disappointed in his hope of a revived Roman Republic, Petrarch reverted to Dante's monarchical ideal,[2] and in another of his rhetorical epistles invited the Emperor Charles IV. to save his country. His eloquence prevailed, but hardly had Charles crossed the Alps when he perceived the vanity of the hopes held out to him, and retreated ignominiously into Germany pursued by the taunts of Petrarch. Finally the poet, as his last hope, made an appeal to the Pope to restore the ancient order by returning from Avignon. "Rome," said he, "calls you here as a spouse, Christendom as her chief." The Pope was to use his influence with the Emperor. "May it seem just to you at least to restore to her her other consort, the Emperor, whom your predecessor Innocent VI. succeeded by a rash engagement in divorcing from her. Deign to remove that impediment, and to *command* that Cæsar should return to Rome. As long as Rome remains deprived of both her chiefs human affairs can never go right, nor can the Christian Republic enjoy peace. If either of you return, all will go well, if both, perfectly, and in the plenitude of glory and success." Urban V. came to Rome for a year, and then returned to Avignon in disgust. "Did not you," writes Petrarch to him, with bitter sarcasm, "like St. Peter, when you fled, meet Christ upon the way? '*Domine, quo vadis?*' 'I go to be crucified there again since you are departing.'" [3]

I have given the foregoing extracts because they vividly illustrate the spirit of the Renaissance in Italy,

[1] Epistle to the Roman People.

[2] "Nulla prorsus apud nos dubitatio relinquitur, monarchiam esse optimam relegendis reparandisque viribus Italis, quas longus bellorum civilium sparsit furor."—*Epist. Fam.* ii. 7.

[3] Reeve (Foreign Classics Series), *Petrarch*, p. 140.

both in its power and in its weakness. As the force of anarchy was greater in Italy than in any other European country, so the idea of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, and the civil order associated with them, raised more vivid memories in the minds of Italians. The deeper study of classical literature, and particularly of the letters of Cicero, opened to men of imagination like Petrarch a clearer view of the actual life of the past, and removed the veil of scholastic prepossession which seemed to separate it from the interests of the present. But the Italians were too near to the scenes of their ancient greatness not to be mastered by them. Their own political institutions were not strong enough to provide a basis of action for the ideas they derived from books; and in the models which they sought to imitate the former life was extinct. The civil conceptions, embodied in the masterpieces of classical literature, required to be transplanted to the north, and grafted on the stock of Teutonic nationality, before they could exercise a fertilising effect on the growth of political liberty.

It was precisely on account of the absence in him of any positive political aim, that the study of classical literature so powerfully influenced Boccaccio, the third member of the great Italian poetical triumvirate, and the one whose genius is perhaps the most characteristic product of the Renaissance in Italy. Boccaccio's art has nothing of the austere purpose of Dante, nothing of the ideal enthusiasm of Petrarch. Every form of practical life seems to have been distasteful to him. As a young man he refused to enter the legal profession to which his father wished to bind him. In his later years he was sent in the service of Florence on certain embassies, but seems to have performed his part without any personal interest. He mingled with the corrupt society of his time with little scandal, but with no indignation, and in a spirit which recalls a famous character in Milton:—

> Belial, in act more graceful and humane,
> A fairer person lost not heaven.
> . . . . .
> . . His thoughts were low:
> To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
> Timorous and slothful.

But, in the sphere of literature pure and simple, the civic spirit of the great classical writers made Boccaccio an enthusiast. He learned the secret of their style, and reading them, not as a pedant but as a man of the world, he so refined his taste that he perceived exactly what steps were necessary, in order to fit the thoughts he derived from them to the different genius of his own language. When he read Guido delle Colonne's *Story of Troy*, he saw at once how the romantic episode of Chryseis, related by that barbarous author, could be combined with the spirit of Ovid's *Art of Love*. A good Latin scholar as the times went, the perusal of Statius' *Thebais* did not move him to mere formal imitation; but, feeling the human interest of the story, he transmuted such parts of it as pleased him into an Italian form, with all the Teutonic accessories of hunting, hawking, tournaments, and love, required to recommend the *Teseide* to the taste of his readers. By the same magic process he improved the rude framework of the trouvères' *fabliau* into a vehicle for the urbanity of Florentine wit. Indeed nothing is more typical of the moral indifference and the artistic skill of Boccaccio than the design of the *Decameron*, the picture of the beautiful garden, with its gay group of citizens, who sing their songs and tell their tales while their plague-stricken city lies almost at their feet. In work like this we seem still to be listening to the voice of Petronius Arbiter, full of the old grace, ease, and refinement; speaking, it is true, in a new language, but so little changed in itself, that it might seem as if thirteen centuries of Christianity had passed away without leaving any trace on the human mind. As regards form, the *Decameron* is the first example in European literature of the revived classic spirit, the principle of which is the direct imitation of Nature, and which, after working so powerfully in the

kindred, but nobler, genius of Chaucer, reached its maturity in the style of Ariosto, Cervantes, and Molière.

The effects in France of the reviving spirit of civil liberty and ancient learning were quite of a contrary character to those in Italy. France was the part of Europe farthest removed from the influence of Roman traditions, both in Church and State, and also the one in which the genius of feudalism was most strongly developed. When the Empire of Charlemagne was divided, a natural repulsion severed the nominal bond of connection between the Eastern half, which carried with it the Imperial inheritance, and the more fertile portion, which contained the Western half of the Frankish monarchy; and in that kingdom itself, the sovereigns of the house of Capet exercised as yet little more than the shadow of authority over the great vassals by whom their territory was surrounded. True, the outlines of the future absolute monarchy were beginning to disclose themselves; but, as late as the middle of the thirteenth century, the feudal principle found emphatic expression in the Code of St. Louis, which laid down the rule that no proclamation of law should be valid beyond the limits of the royal domain. The Dukes of Normandy, the Counts of Brittany, Champagne, Armagnac, Artois, and Languedoc, were supreme in their own provinces in all matters relating to Justice, Taxation, and Currency.

In like manner the central power of the Church exerted in France a comparatively feeble influence. The Gallican Church recognised theoretically the supremacy of the Pope. But in practice the latter had to rely, for the maintenance of his spiritual authority, chiefly on the disciplined propaganda of the preaching orders, and so long as these orders continued to place at his disposal men qualified to command the schools, he was able through them to control the power of the University of Paris. It was evident, however, that the supply of minds like St. Thomas Aquinas must at some time fail, and that then the religious and intellectual energy of the orders would be insufficient to cope with the abiding local influence of

the Gallican hierarchy and the independent constitution of the University. Before the advent of the Schoolmen the first notes of spiritual revolt had been sounded by Berengar and Abelard; and when William de Saint Amour's book, *Concerning the Perils of the Last Times*, was condemned by Papal Bull, the whole of the University rallied round their rector in opposition to the authority of Pope and King.[1]

Out of this spirit of local independence arose two results, both of which reflected themselves vividly in the French literature of those times. The first was the large development of the institutions of feudalism. A society grew up which, in defect of any central system of authority, was scarcely raised above the level of tribal barbarism, but which was closely bound together by the freemasonry of custom and sentiment, and most tenacious of its rights in each district within its sovereignty. The seat of this society was the Castle; and, as has been already said, the lords within the castle were careful to separate their manners from those of their subjects without, by all the distinctions of caste. An image of the artificial sentiments of the castellated aristocracy is presented in the poetry of the troubadours. For that the inspiration of the Provençals was not a spontaneous outbreak of local imagination, but an elaborate system, having its base in the customs and institutions of the time, is an opinion capable of historical proof. Chivalry was itself the code of feudal life; and while, on its military side, it defined the rules of knightly conduct, in the social sphere it had a far wider application, and exercised a jurisdiction over all those difficult and delicate circumstances which regulate the order of manners and the intercourse between the sexes. The standard of a knight's conduct in the field was, of course, determined by the universal laws of chivalry; but beyond what was there required of him, his behaviour in refined society was strictly regulated by the Courts of Love.

These institutions, which seem to have been imitated from the courts in which the feudal lord administered justice,

[1] See Milman's *History of Latin Christianity* (1864), vol. vi. pp. 343-352.

can be traced back as far as the middle of the twelfth century. They were presided over by great ladies, conspicuous among whom were Marie, Countess of Champagne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Ermengard of Narbonne. The laws of "Love" administered in them were simply the rules of pleasing—showing one's self "aimable"—in feminine society, the standard being determined by a code of 31 articles, which were fabled to have been attached to a ring on the neck of a falcon, found by a knight of the court of King Arthur. These define, with great precision and delicacy of observation, the signs of true love, and what may be required of a lover. Whenever a doubtful case arose, it was referred to one of the presidents of the Courts of Love, who decided the point of equity, by reference to the statutes, with a nicety of logic rivalling that of the "précieuses" of the seventeenth century. At the close of the twelfth, or the beginning of the thirteenth, century, these cases were collected by a writer calling himself André le Chapelain, who made them the basis for a scientific treatise entitled *De Amore*, in which he discussed the whole subject of Love in the spirit of the statutes. Love is, in André's treatise, defined as "a passion arising from sight and thought";[1] but it is described as being mainly an affection of the mind produced by beautiful manners.[2] Recognising that eloquence is a powerful factor in arousing this emotion, the author shows in a number of imaginary dialogues the different ways in which a proposal of love should be made, so as to befit the social rank of the parties concerned. In each case the male speaker opens his suit with an argument to prove that he ought to be listened to, while the lady, who is an equally expert logician, meets him with objections, which have to be removed before she will yield an inch of her defensive position. Here, for example, is an argument, in which one of these models of female virtue entrenches herself against the too eager assaults of her suitor:—

"Says the woman:—'You seem to me to have wandered

[1] "Est igitur illa passio innata ex visione et cogitatione."—Andreæ Capellani, lib. i. cap. 1.

[2] *Ibid.* lib. i. cap. 6.

far from the road of love, and to be a transgressor against the excellent and fitting custom of lovers, in that you ask for love so quickly. For when a wise and well-schooled lover addresses a lady, hitherto quite unknown to him, at a first visit, he ought not to demand her favour with an explicit declaration of love, but to take pains to furnish his lady with a knowledge of his character, and in all his words to approve himself gentle and agreeable to her: next let him take care that in his absence all his deeds commend him rightly to his lady; and then at last he may safely venture to ask for her love. But you have disturbed this order by a palpable breach of rules, which I suppose you have committed, either because you supposed that I should show myself over-easy in granting your request, or because you are not skilled in the art of love. Hence your love must justly remain under suspicion.'"[1]

This passage by itself is sufficient to show how far feudal society must have advanced in intellectual refinement, in order to establish such scientific rules of intercourse between the sexes. The poetry of the troubadours is simply a lyrical rendering of this prevailing social fashion. For with all the appearance of exuberant passion, flowing sentiment, inexhaustible fancy, their verse will be found on examination to be merely variations of two or three main themes, all of which are contained in the statutes of Love. The following may serve as examples:—

Rule 2. Nemo duplici potest amore ligari.

"Every other attachment is foreign to my heart. The love that I have for you can never leave me. The passion I feel is such that I cannot conceive any other like it."—*Giraud de Salignac.*[2]

"O dear lady, I am and shall be yours for ever. Devoted to your orders I am your servant and liegeman. I belong to you for ever. You were my first love; you will be my last. My happiness will end only with my life."—*Bernard de Ventadour.*[3]

Rule 20. Amorosus semper est timorosus.

"I feel at once vivid joy and painful sadness when I am in your

[1] Translated from Andreæ Capellani, *De Amore*, lib. i. c. 6.

[2] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. ii. p. xx. In this and the following extracts I have translated Raynouard's translation, which is only a paraphrase of the original.

[3] *Ibid.* ii. p. xix.

presence: the timidity which prevents me from avowing the love my heart burns with secretly makes me sad: the pleasure of gazing on the most charming of women makes me joyous."—*Elias de Barjols.*[1]

Rule 15. Omnis consuevit amans in aspectu coamantis pallescere.

"The moment I see my love a sudden fear seizes me: my eye is troubled; my colour flies; I tremble like a leaf that the wind shakes; I have no more reason than a child; so much does love disturb me."—*Bernard de Ventadour.*[2]

Rule 3. Qui non celat amare non potest.

"If you deign to grant me any favour, dearest of ladies, know that I would suffer death rather than commit the slightest indiscretion. Ah! I pray God to end my days the moment that I shall commit the crime of betraying the secret of your goodness."—*Arnauld de Marueil.*[3]

Rule 30. Verus amans assiduâ sine intermissione coamantis imagine detinetur.

"I do well to avoid and leave you, dear lady, for such is the liveliness of my love that it is impossible for my heart to be quit of your image. Even during my sleep I imagine myself to laugh and frolic in your company; I enjoy supreme happiness. But when I awake, I see, I perceive, I feel that this imaginary happiness is changed into real torment."—*Arnauld de Marueil.*[4]

In short, in the idea of the chivalrous society of the thirteenth century, to love was a liberal education, and the art of poetry, as practised by the Provençals, lay in the elaboration of a peculiar sentiment and language, which served to separate the manners of a ruling caste from those of the unsophisticated crowd. The fashion of chivalry reached its height during the Crusades, and having found its poetical expression in the exalted though artificial songs of the troubadours, crystallised, as we shall presently see, into an allegorical and didactic style.

On the other hand, in opposition to the ruling feudal society, itself so lawless and incoherent, and distinguished by a code of manners in many respects so fantastic, there was growing, in the heart of France, the embryo of the people, the nucleus of the Tiers État, representing the municipal and commercial interests of the great towns. Allied with the bourgeois, sometimes against the feudal aristocracy, sometimes against his ecclesiastical superiors,

[1] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, ii. p. xx.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. p. xii. [3] *Ibid.* ii. p. xxiii. [4] *Ibid.* ii. p. xxii.

and always against the mendicant monastic armies of the Pope, was the scholar of the university. The fusion of these two forces produced the peculiar character of the French Renaissance, which, through the whole course of its history, was occupied less with the construction of practical political liberty, than with undermining by keen analysis the strongholds of feudal privilege. This party too had its poetical instrument in the rude *fabliau* of the trouvère, or the satirical *chanson* of the burgess, which formed a natural counterpoise to the lyrics of the troubadours. Curiously enough, by a happy effort of invention, the opposition of the feudal and democratic principles is reflected in a single French poem, which therefore furnishes as clear an image of the thoughts which, in the thirteenth century, were dividing the mind of France, as the *Divina Commedia* presents of the state of Italy. And not of France alone. Wherever the institutions of feudalism were established, the shock communicated by this poem was felt, so that whoever wishes to understand the spirit of the great majority of poems written in England between the reigns of Edward III. and Henry VIII. must first make the acquaintance of the *Romance of the Rose.*

*Le Roman de la Rose* was the work of two authors, of whom the second took up and completed, in an analytical and satirical vein, what the first had begun in a spirit of chivalrous sentiment, but had left unfinished. William de Lorris, a trouvère of Touraine, in the district near the Loire, seems to have written his part about 1240. As far as can be ascertained, he had no immediate predecessor in the allegorical style which he adopted as the vehicle for expressing the sentiments of the Courts of Love; but many of his materials were derived from text-books commonly used in the schools, such as Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturæ*, and the *Somnium Scipionis* of Macrobius. Taking his initial hint from the last-named book, he feigns to have found himself in a dream near a beautiful garden, the exterior wall of which was covered with representations of the infirmities of human nature, such as Old Age and Poverty, and of the

peculiarly anti-chivalric vices, Hate, Envy, Covetousness, and Avarice. Entering the garden which surrounds the Palace of Love, he finds there all that is pleasant and delightful, and sees the two chief members of Love's *comitatus*, Leisure and Wealth, and, above all, the beautiful lady, Bel Accueil or Fair Reception. Nothing vulgar or unrefined is admitted into this company.[1] When the newcomer enters the garden Love himself appears and aims at him five arrows—Beauty, Candour, Sincerity, Courtesy, Sweet Conversation—which, as may be imagined, overwhelm his heart, already inflamed with a passionate desire to possess a rose-bud of unequalled beauty, growing in the neighbourhood of Fair Reception.

With the over-confidence of an unskilled lover—which we have seen reproved elsewhere in the dialogues of André le Chapelain—he asks leave to touch and gather this rose. Whereupon Fair Reception in much confusion gives place to Shame, Fear, and Jealousy. The lover is shut out of the garden, and in his distress betakes himself to an accomplished friend, who gives him long and elaborate advice as to the manner in which he should conduct his suit. This homily is of the greatest interest, as illustrating both the manners of chivalry and the literary standard on which the new Art of Love was formed. William de Lorris had evidently read Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* with great attention, and followed the method of that poem, while at the same time he was well aware that the precepts it contains were entirely inapplicable to the society for which he himself wrote.

Thus while the Roman poet speaks throughout with cynical frankness, the trouvère is almost prudish in his refinements.[2] The lover, he says, contrary to Ovid's advice, must be minutely particular in the matter of dress,

[1] Si me baiseras en la bouche,
A cui nus vilains hons n'atouche,
Je n'i laisse mie atouchier
Chascun vilain, chacun porchier.
*Roman de la Rose*, 1945.

[2] Ja por nommer vilaine chose
Ne doit la bouche estre desclose,
Je ne tiens pas a courtois homme
Qui orde chose et laide nomme.—*Ibid.* 2121.

and especially as to his boots, sleeves, gloves, and belt.[1] He must have all the qualities of an accomplished knight, —riding, singing, music, and dancing.[2] Above all he must be free from avarice.[3] Fortified with these instructions the lover returns to the garden, and urges his plea with such success, that Fair Reception consents to see him again, though with a hedge between them. At this interview the lover having managed to advance some points, is at last emboldened to ask if he may kiss the rose. Fair Reception replies, not however very discouragingly, that this is going rather far ; but Venus, who in all the numerous poems of this class plays the part of reconciler, reproves the lady in a long lecture, and persuades her to grant the lover's request. The consequences are terrible. Slander, Shame, and Jealousy wake Danger, and the lover is turned out of the garden a second time, while Fair Reception is not only confined in a fortress four-square, with a castle at each corner, under the command of one of the four personages just mentioned, but is even placed under the keeping of an old duenna, who does not seem to enjoy the advantage of being an abstraction.

At this point William de Lorris broke off his narrative. Whether he was tired of his long-drawn allegory, whether invention failed him, or whether he died, is uncertain ; but his fragmentary work at least shows that he had no other intention in his poem than to reflect the aristocratic spirit of chivalric manners, as embodied in the statutes of the Courts of Love. Love and his characteristic companions, Wealth and Leisure ; the beautiful garden, like that in the *Decameron*, removed from all the diseases and evil affections of human life ; the love-suit protracted according to the usual conventions ; are quite in the manner of André le Chapelain's text-book. William's successor, Jehan de Meung, makes Love say of him : "When Tibullus died I broke my bow weeping ; I cut my wings ; I scattered the feathers on his tomb. Venus, my mother, had not so much

[1] *Roman de la Rose*, 2152-2164. See Ovid, *Ars Amat.* i. 509 :—

Forma viros neglecta decet.

[2] *Roman de la Rose*, 2205-2218. [3] *Ibid.* 2226.

to weep in the loss of her Adonis. I have no longer to console me Catullus, Ovid, or Gallus; but William de Lorris remains, whom Jealousy exposes at this moment to the greatest dangers. He is worthy of my support on account of his long service, and for having begun the Romance in which my laws and precepts shall be taught. He will carry on his work up to the point at which he will say to Fair Reception—

Moult sui durement esmaiés
Que entr'oblié ne m'aiés.
Si en ai duel et desconfort,
Jamais n'iert rien qui me confort,
Si je pers votre bienvoillance;
Car je n'ai mes aillors fiance.

William shall then rest in peace. May his tomb breathe for ever an odour of incense, of balm and of aloes. After him shall come Limping John, born at Meun-on-Loire, who shall be faithful to me all his life, and shall show, I trust, wisdom enough to be for ever far removed from Lady Reason, my enemy."[1]

William de Lorris had broken off his narrative with an exclamation of hopelessness on the part of the lover—

Et si je l'ai perdu espoir
A poi que ne m'en desespoir—:[2]

Jehan de Meung catches up the word: "Despair? Nay! I will not despair—for if hope were to fail me I should show myself a coward. In this thought I will take courage;"[3] and he accordingly again faces the adventure. But the perils which now beset him in the shape of arguments and lectures might have deterred any less resolute person. For, in the first place, Reason descends from her tower, and asks him if he is satisfied with the master whom he has chosen, and whose real nature she undertakes to expose to him in an argument extending over more than 2000 lines. In the first place she defines Love

[1] *Roman de la Rose*, v. 10,537.

[2] *Ibid.* v. 4068.

[3] Desespoir? las! je non ferai,
Je ne m'en desespererai;
Car s'esperance m'erst faillans
Je ne seroie pas vaillans:
En li me doi renconforter.—*R. de la R.* 4070.

in terms which must have caused André le Chapelain and William de Lorris to turn in their graves. "Love," she says, "is a hateful peace, an amorous hate."[1] It is, moreover, "an evil which obliges us to search for all the means of seeing, addressing, and touching a person of the other sex."[2] "Men," she continues, in a bitter passage to which Christine de Pisan afterwards called attention in her *Epître au Dieu d'Amours*—"men often affect to be stricken with this disease before they really are so; they ill-use women, and after all it is the best course;" for "it is better to deceive than to be deceived."[3] The end of the division between the two sexes, says Reason, is simply the continuation of the species. Any pleasure attached to their intercourse is accidental, and should not cause the true end to be forgotten. The sermonising Abstraction then proceeds, in her most discursive vein, to blame the disposition of the young, merely in order to show that she has read Cicero's *De Senectute;* and praises Friendship as opposed to Love, to display her acquaintance with the *De Amicitia.* Having thus got into the stride of her philosophy, she goes on to praise the happiness of the independent poor man, and to reflect on the different kinds of unhappiness in the life of merchants, lawyers, physicians, wandering preachers, and the king himself. All this, rambling as it is, is full of vigorous *genre* painting which gives it a certain interest for the modern reader, though it must have been inexpressibly tiresome to the lover, who after a while thinks it advisable to divert the flow of Reason's eloquence, by asking her whether justice or love is the greater virtue. In answering, Love, Reason appears to be guilty of some inconsistency; but we understand her meaning when we find that she has seized the opportunity to make a violent attack upon the king's judges,[4] and to introduce the story

[1] Amors est pais haïneuse,
Amors est haïne amoureuse.—*Roman de la Rose*, 4307.

[2] *Ibid.* 4409.

[3] *Ibid.* 4409.

[4] Mais or vendent les jugemens,
Tuit s'efforcent de l'autrui pendre.
Tex juges fait le larron pendre
Qui miex déust estre pendus,
Se jugement li fust rendus.—*Ibid.* 5603.

of Appius and Virginia. She next proceeds to transfer from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* the allegorical description of the goddess Fortune, so often utilised by poets in the Middle Ages, to which she appends a list of unfortunate men — Nero, Crassus, Sisigambis, Manfred, Conradin — and as the conclusion of her argument, demands

> C'est que tu me vueilles amer,
> Et que le dieu d'Amors despises,
> Et que Fortune rien ne prises.[1]

The lover, who has, throughout her long tirade, shown a certain skill in putting Reason on her defence, now reproaches her, in the spirit of William de Lorris, for using coarse language, and Reason defends herself by alleging the necessity of calling things by their proper names.

Having at last escaped from this long-winded antagonist, the lover returns for advice to his old friend and confidant, whose sentiments seem to have been revolutionised since his first appearance in the pages of William de Lorris, and are now coloured with all the pagan effrontery of Ovid. "A great heavy purse all crammed with besants," says this friend, "is the one thing needful."[2] He indeed expresses his regrets for the departure of the Golden Age, thereby making an opening for reference to his favourite poet; but he introduces, in the manner of the *fabliau*, a modern husband complaining of the extravagance of his wife, and inveighing against women and marriage.[3] Returning to Ovid and the Golden Age, the friend maintains that the first men knew nothing of marriage. Then Jason brought the Golden Fleece, after which came riches, poverty, oppression, fraud. Excessive evils required excessive remedies: it became necessary to preserve the rights of property in goods and wife.

[1] *R. de la R.* v. 6896.

[2] *Ibid.* v. 8385; cf. Ovid, *Ars Amat.* i. 419-436.

[3] Preude femme, par Saint Denis,
Il en est mains que de fenis . . .
Tout estes, serés ou fustes,
De fait ou de volenté putes.—*R. de la R.* 9192.

This seems to be the original source of "Every woman is at heart a rake"; though of course Pope got the idea from more modern authors.

Hence arose marriage and monarchy. "Men chose among themselves a big-boned 'villain,' the largest and stoutest man they could find, and made him their prince and lord."[1]

When the lover has been sufficiently schooled in these new opinions, he tries to re-enter the garden by means of Prodigality, but seeing Poverty coming, he desists. Love, however, comes to his aid, and after making him recite his twelve commandments, promises to send him all his barons to assist him in his siege of the fortress. The barons' names are Leisure, Nobility-of-Heart, Riches, Frankness, Pity, Liberality, Courage, Honour, Courtesy, Pleasure, Simplicity, Beauty, Youth, Patience, Humility, and Discretion, but with this refined company come two strange abstractions, Constrained Abstinence and False-Seeming, whose presence is explained by the consideration that, in order to please ladies, it is necessary to use deceit. False-Seeming is dressed in the garb of the preaching friars, or Dominicans, and the author reflects in the character the bitter hatred towards this order felt by the scholars of the University of Paris. He is represented as asking alms, but living on the best; and as carrying Bulls which permit him to confess, while he absolves without hearing a word of confession. He is also a propagator of the mysterious *Everlasting Gospel*, the heretical book against which the University had protested in the days of William de Saint-Amour.[2] The part which False-Seeming plays is curious and characteristic, for after the siege has been pushed with such vigour that Slander is driven to capitulate, the friar having granted her terms, cuts out her tongue with a razor concealed under his Dominican robe.

The fortress, however, still holds out; and at last the lover has recourse through bribes to the old duenna, first mentioned by William de Lorris, who undertakes to per-

[1] Ung grand vilain entre eux eslurent,
Le plus ossu de quanque furent,
Le plus corsu et le greignor,
Si le furent prince et seignor.—*R. de la R.* 9645.

[2] For the history of this curious book see Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. vii. pp. 348-350.

suade the lady to surrender. This old woman's character and sentiments are portrayed with astonishing plainness, the materials being borrowed almost entirely from Ovid's *Art of Love*, *Heroides*, and *Amores*. She advises the lady to strip all her lovers down to the last crown, and seeks to corrupt her mind with tales of Dido, Phyllis, Medea, Œnone, Mars and Venus. Apparently the poet feels that some apology is required for his freedom of speech, for he excuses himself with the plea that he is merely repeating the opinions of ancient authors.[1] Under the influence of the duenna, the lady at last consents to receive the lover, but his rashness again brings Danger upon the scene, who puts the lady into a dungeon, and the interminable war proceeds.

At this point, without the slightest pretext, the poet suddenly transports the reader to the workshop of Nature, where that goddess is represented engaged in the arts by which she provides for the continuance of things. A long cosmogony follows, in the course of which the poet attempts to reconcile free will with the justice and omnipotence of God.[2] Nature, plunged in sorrow, confesses herself to Genius. Her grief arises from the contemplation of Man, who alone, of created things, opposes himself to her established laws. If comets are cited as another example of lawlessness, this, says Nature, is bad reasoning; for though comets are supposed to be irregular portents announcing the death of princes, the lives of princes are not worth an apple more than the lives of ordinary mortals.[3] On this democratic text the goddess dilates, showing that renown of nobility is not

[1] *Roman de la Rose*, 15,430.

[2] This cosmogony is an extremely interesting compendium of the science of the period, particularly in respect of the opinions expressed about alchemy (see v. 16,287). The poet's speculations as to the substance of the moon may be compared by the curious reader with what Dante says on the same subject.—*R. de la R.* 17,057; *Paradiso*, canto ii. 59-148

[3] Ne li prince ne sont par digne
Que li cors du ciel doignent signe
De lor mort plus que d'un autre homme;
Car lor cors ne vault une pomme
Oultre le cor d'un charruier
Ou d'un clerc, ou d'un escuier.—*R. de la R.* 18,788.

transmitted: greatness of sentiment alone can give it. Clerks ought to be accounted more noble than barons, since the former are better acquainted with the examples of good and evil life, and the reasons for preferring good to evil. Gawain and Count Robert of Artois are selected as the models of nobility.

Finally Nature despatches Genius to the aid of the god of Love, and the new commander-in-chief makes a long speech to the army besieging the fortress. He excommunicates all who war against their own inclinations, thus furnishing Rabelais with the hint for his "Fais ce que vouldras." Those who have followed their inclinations and have left behind them many children will enjoy heavenly happiness, provided that before dying they receive absolution for their sins. Genius then throws his torch into the air, and the flame, penetrating into the prison of the lady, melts the hearts of all those who are keeping her prisoner.

I have given the above analysis of the *Romance of the Rose* because, in spite of its rambling and incoherent form, it is the work of a poet of extraordinary power, and illustrates, more vividly than any poem of the Middle Ages, the inward nature of the political and literary forces which combined, on the one hand for the overthrow of French feudalism, and on the other for the development of the French Renaissance. From the first to the last line of the part composed by Jehan de Meung the poem bristles with fierce oppositions of thought. The perfumed and superfine fancies of the courtly minstrel are here confronted with the brutal plainness of the bourgeois satirist; Nature and Reason—if it is permissible to apply a homely metaphor to such venerable abstractions—like bulls in the china shop of chivalry, crash about among all the delicate and mystical ideals—the principle of allegiance, the pride of ancestry, the worship of women—with which imagination had adorned the Feudal System; the lofty ascetic aims of the mendicant orders are contrasted with their actual performances; the pagan learning of the university scholar rises in revolt against the authority of the Schoolmen; Ovid and Cicero encounter

André le Chapelain ; and the materialistic speculations of Arabian philosophy prevail over the ethics of Aristotle.

It is not surprising that such a lawless force should have produced a vast disturbance among the established institutions of the period. For some time, indeed, the revolutionary significance of Jehan de Meung's work remained undetected. But as the tide of feudalism and scholasticism continued to ebb through the fourteenth century, the scandal of so popular a poem naturally increased. In 1399 Christine de Pisan, as the champion of the ladies, attacked it in her *Epître au Dieu d'Amours*, with all the ardour and delicacy of her sex ; and in 1402 a more formidable antagonist, John Gerson, the famous Chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote his *Traité contre le roumant de la Rose*, on behalf of the Christian religion. This work takes the form of an allegory, in which the author feigns that he found himself in the Court of Christianity—the imagery is plainly borrowed from the Courts of Love—presided over by Lady Canonical Justice, and her assessors Mercy and Truth, who received the complaint of Chastity "contre les forfaitures intolerables que lui avoir faites un qui se faisoit nommer le Fol Amoureux."[1] But this is to anticipate.

Very different, and for the moment far less apparent, were the effects of the Renaissance in England. Politically speaking, in the middle of the thirteenth century, no country in Europe had conceived, with anything like the clearness of England, the idea of national life and of the just relations between Church and State. Many opposite conditions had combined to produce this favourable result. Of these the most important was perhaps the insular position of the kingdom, which separated it from the imperial system of Charlemagne, and, while the continent of Europe was being swept by the tumultuary tides of feudalism, permitted the Saxon tribes to bring their institutions under the control of a single government. Had the Saxon race, however, remained in complete isolation, a certain slowness of temperament, which is apt

[1] *Histoire Littéraire de France*, vol. xxiii. p. 47.

to disguise its more heroic qualities, might have sunk it in torpor and decay. Happily it was seldom left long without feeling the spur of external aggression or internal suffering. The gradual conversion of the whole country to Christianity brought England into the religious system of Europe. The invasions of the Danes helped to promote the feeling of national unity, and infused new blood and energy into the northern part of the island. The Normans from the south communicated a fresh shock to the national life by the introduction of feudal institutions, and of a ruling race possessed of all the qualities in which the exhausted Saxon dynasty was deficient. Overwhelmed for the time by the Conquest, the English, nevertheless, preserved their ancient national traditions, and this element has never failed finally to determine the balance of power between the opposing principles and parties out of which the constitution has been developed.

Thus a strong central power in the king was necessary to maintain the predominance of the conquering race ; and a succession of great rulers—Henry I., Henry II., and Edward I.—proved themselves equal to their position. Weakened, however, by the inadequate right of inheritance among the early Norman kings, and by the incapacity of some of their successors, the Crown, in its frequent struggles with its great vassals, was forced to rely on the support of the people, while at other times the nobles turned for assistance to the same quarter. Hence arose the charter of Henry I., *Magna Carta*, and the *Confirmatio Cartarum* under Edward I. At the coronation of Edward II. a primate of Norman birth asked the king, "Will you grant and keep, and by your oath confirm, to the people of England, the laws and customs to them granted by the ancient kings of England, your righteous and godly predecessors, and especially the laws, customs, and privileges granted to the clergy and people by the glorious king, Saint Edward your predecessor?"[1] To the same "laws, customs, and privileges," inherent in the Saxon nation, the Norman barons themselves, in alliance with the people, appealed, when

[1] Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England*, vol. ii. p. 344.

their liberties were threatened by the power of the Crown, now grown excessive by established inherited right. And so too, in the repeated struggles between Church and king, the support of an organised public sympathy was thrown into one scale or the other, according as the opposite principle appeared the more dangerous to the interests of freedom and justice.

In many different directions the English people, in the thirteenth century, is seen to be forming for itself a school of thought, closely resembling on a larger scale that "political education" which was the offspring of the best days of civic freedom in Greece and Rome, and the parent of all that was greatest in Greek and Latin literature. The idea of England as a nation presents itself in the utterances of every order of Englishmen, strongly mixed, no doubt, with class selfishness, yet instinct with the genuine spirit of patriotism. It animates the eloquence not only of the representatives of the laity in the House of Commons, but of the clergy in their Synods. It appears in the speech of Edward I. when he appealed to his Parliament for supplies, on the ground that what concerns all is the business of all; in Simon de Montfort's elementary scheme of popular representation; in the opposition offered by Grossetete, Bishop of Lincoln, to the induction of foreign priests into English benefices. And, lastly, it is reflected with great vividness in the rude popular poetry, which, from the reign of John, began to circulate freely among the clergy and the commons.

These political songs were composed in English, French, or Latin, and sometimes in maccaroni verses of all three languages. They range over every kind of subject and style, from the satirical *sirvente* of the noble troubadour, who attacks the king for his cowardice in not defending his continental possessions, down to the complaint of the husbandman groaning under the burdens that oppress his industry. Many, perhaps most, of them seem to have been composed by the clergy, in the various styles adapted to catch the taste of the audience of the moment. In all of them the point to be taken is put forward with the most outspoken freedom, and is embodied in a metrical form, meant to be

remembered and repeated. The following examples will illustrate what has been said. A husbandman in the reign of Edward I. laments his hard lot—

Luther is to leosen ther ase lutil ys,
And haveth monie hynen that hopieth thereto;
The hayward heteth us harm to habben of his;
The bailiff bockneth us bale, and weneth wel do;
The wodeward waiteth us wo that loketh under rys;
Ne mai us ryse no rest richeis ne ro.
Thus me pileth the pore that is of lute pris:
Nede in swot and in swynk swynde mot swo.

Nede he mot swynde thah he hade swore,
That nath nout en hod his hed for te hude.
Thus wil walketh in londe, and lawe is for-lore,
And al is piked of the pore, the prikyare's prude.[1]

Another song, very popular in the first years of the fourteenth century, points to the sympathy between the clergy and the poor, who were in alliance against the extortions of the rich and powerful. Something of the spirit of John Ball, though kept within due bounds, animates such sentiments as these: "Were Holy Church to put forth her might, and also the law of the land, then covetousness and injustice should be banished out of the land. Holy Church should withhold its judgment neither for fear nor love, nor should she forbear from showing her might for fear of the boast of lords in high place; nor from interdicting and admonishing all those, whoever they be, that rob law-abiding men, and those 'hoblers' in particular that take from the husbandman the fruit of the earth; men ought not to bury them in any church, but cast them out like a dog."[2] To illustrate his text the poet tells with

[1] Evil it is to lose when there is but little; and many hinds there are that hope to get it: the hedge-ward promises us harm, if we take of his; the bailiff threatens us with evil, and intends certainly to do it; the woodward has woe in store for us that look (for fuel) under the boughs; neither riches nor repose come or remain for us. Thus men strip the poor man that is of little value: needs must he thus waste away in sweat and toil. Needs must he waste though he be sworn [to his lord], that hath no hood wherein to hide his head. Thus will walks in the land, and law is lost, and all the horseman's finery is picked from the poor.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 149. The obscure allusion to the "hood" may possibly have reference to the fact that a "villein" might not leave his lord's service to become a priest or monk.

[2] Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 196.

great humour the fable of the Fox, the Wolf, and the Ass. Once upon a time the Lion, hearing evil reports of the Wolf and the Fox, summoned them to court to answer for their misdeeds. These culprits took the precaution to send presents to court beforehand, but the Ass, who was also included in the indictment, relying on his innocence, sent nothing. When the Fox was called upon to plead, he lied, asserting that he had bought his hens and geese and carried them home on his back, and the Lion taking his word, let him go free. The Wolf disdained to lie, and admitted that he had killed a few kids and sheep on the downs, but maintained that he had done no harm, and his plea also was accepted by the Lion, who decided that he had only done after his nature. Then turning to the Ass, the Lion asked—

"Sei thou me, Asse, wat hast i-do?
Me thenchith thou cannist no gode.
Whi nadistou, as other mo?
Thou come of lither stode."

"Sertis, Sire, not ie noȝt;
Ie ete sage alnil gras,—
More harm nei did ie noȝt,
Therfor i-wreiid ie was."

"Bel ami, that was mis-do,
That was aȝe thi kund,
For to ete such gras so:—
Hastilich ȝe him bind.

"Al his bonis ȝe to-draw,
Loke that ȝe noȝt lete;
And that ie ȝive al for lawe,
That his fleis be al i-frette."[1]

1 "Say, Ass, what hast thou done? Methinks thou canst do nothing good. Why hast thou not done as all the others? Thou comest from an evil place." "Certes, sire, I know nothing of it. I eat only sage and grass. No more harm than this I did: therefore I was accused." "Good friend, that was ill-done: that was against thy nature, to eat grass so. Bind him quickly; let all his bones be drawn asunder: look that ye leave him not: and that I give as my sentence that his flesh be all torn to pieces."—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 200.

The song ends—

Anureth God and holi church,
  And ȝivith the pouir that habbith nede,
So Godis wille ȝe ssul wirche,
  And joi of heven hab to mede.
    To which joi us bring
    Jhesus Crist heven king.[1]

This song is inspired by the love of stories about beasts and birds, which the Teutonic races perhaps brought with them from their old homes in the East. In the following passage, from a poem on Edward II.'s violation of a charter he had confirmed, the Anglo-Saxon fondness for proverbial jingles is apparent. Four wise men are supposed to deliver their sentiments on the occasion, of whom the first two, who are also the most intelligible, speak thus—

The firste seide, "I understonde
Ne may no king wel ben in londe
  Under God Almihte,
But he cun himself rede
Hou he shall in londe lede
  Everi man wid rihte.
    For miht is riht,
    Liht is niht,
    And fiht is fliht.
For miht is riht, the lond is laweles,
For niht is liht, the lond is loreles,
For fiht is fliht, the lond is nameles."

That other seide a word ful god,
"Whoso roweth aȝein the flod,
  Of sorwe he shal drinke;
Also it fareth bi the unsele,
A man shal have litel hele
  That agein to swinke.
    Nu on is two,
    Another [And wel ?] is wo,
    And frend is fo.
For on is two, that lond is streintheles;
For wel is wo, the lond is reutheles;
For frend is fo, the lond is loveles."[2]

[1] Honour God and Holy Church, and give to the poor that have need. So shall ye do God's will, and have the joy of heaven as your reward. To which joy may Jesus Christ, heaven's King, bring us.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 205.

[2] The first said, "I understand that no king may be prosperous in his land under God Almighty unless he can counsel himself how to lead every man in the

In all these songs in the vernacular speech is heard the bitter cry of the Saxon *ceorl*, whom long decay and the introduction into England of the Feudal System had sunk to the hopeless condition of "villenage." Deprived of the customary rights of wood and hay attached to his holding, exposed to extortionate demands by the tax-collector, and to the petty tyranny of the royal purveyors, the position of the villein had become almost intolerable. To meet the exactions of his different oppressors he was forced to sell his green corn, his horse, and even his seed[1]; and as early as the reign of Edward I. a great rising of the commons was anticipated by the song-writers, though it was actually delayed till the time of Richard II.[2] These rude outbursts of homely feeling, with their pathetic undernote of religious resignation, show us better even than the statutes and ordinances of the period, why the followers of Wat Tyler sought to destroy the Green Wax, or rate-rolls of the Hundred, and all records of villenage.[3]

But they show us also, in their uncouth and archaic strains, how great were the difficulties of expressing even the most elementary feelings poetically in the vulgar tongue. Most of the surviving political songs of the period are

land with justice. For might is right, light is night, fight is flight. Because might is right, the land is without law; because night is light, the land is without learning; because fight is flight, the land is without honour." The next said a very good word: "Whoso rows against the stream he shall drink of sorrow. So it fares with the unfortunate; a man shall have little remedy by striving against it. Now one is two, well is woe, friend is foe. Because one is two, the land is without strength; because well is woe, the land is without pity; because friend is foe, the land is without love."—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 254.

[1] Song of the Husbandman, *passim*, Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 151.

[2] Gentz a tiel meschief quod nequeunt plus dare,
Je me doute, s'ils ussent chief, quod vellent levare.
*Ibid.* p. 186.

[3] Ȝet cometh budeles [beadles] with muche bost,
"Greythe [get] me silver to the grene wax:
Thou art writen y my writ that thou wost" [what thou knowest].
Mo then ten sythen [more than ten times] told y my tax.
Thenne mot yet habbe hennen a-rost,
Feyre on fyshe day lamprey ant lax" [salmon].
*Ibid.* p. 151.

The roast fowls and fish were doubtless demanded for the royal purveyance. As to the Green Wax, see Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England* (1880), vol. ii. p. 492.

written either in Latin, the language with which the clerical composers were best acquainted, in French, or in a medley of French and Latin. When French, or French and Latin, is used, it may be inferred that the audience addressed is of that middling class which, as we see from the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, possessed a few scraps of Latin, and would have been able, with a little explanation, to follow the meaning of the song.[1] Here is a specimen of a maccaroni song written against the king's taxes, and especially against the custom of seizing the wool, which was only stopped by statute in the reign of Edward III.:—

Ore court en Engleterre de anno in annum
Le quinzeme dener pur fere sic commune dampnum
E fet avaler que soleyent sedere super scamnum,
E vendre fet commune gent vaccas, vas, et pannum.
Non placet ad summum quindenum sic dare nummum.

Une chose est contre foy, unde gens gravatur,
Que la meyté ne vient al roy, in regno quod levatur,
Pur ce qu'il n'ad tot l'enter, prout sibi datur,
Le peuple doit le plus doner, et sic sincopatur.
Nam quæ taxantur, regi non omnia dantur.

Unquore plus greve à simple gent collectio lanarum,
Que vendre fet communement divitias earum;
Ne puet estre que tiel conseil constat Deo carum
Issi destruire le poverail pondus per amarum.
Non est lex sana quod regi sit mea lana.

Uncore est plus outre peis, ut testantur gentes,
En le sac deus pers ou treis, per vim retinentes.
A qui remeindra cele legne? quidam respondentes,
Que ja n'avera roy ne regne, sed tantum colligentes.
Pondus lanarum tam falsum constat amarum.

Depus que le roy vodera tam multum cepisse
Entre les riches si purra satis invenisse,
E plus à ce que m'est avys et melius fecisse
Des grant partie aver prie, et parvis pepercisse.
Qui capit argentum sine causâ peccat egentum.[2]

[1] Compare analysis of *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, on p. 210.

[2] Now runs in England from year to year the tax of the fifteenth penny to do such general harm, and sinks to a low level those who used to sit upon the bench, and makes the common people sell their cows, and vessels, and clothes. It is not pleasant thus to pay money up to the last fifteenth. One

Another frequent theme of the political songs is the universal corruption of justice, whether in the ecclesiastical or in the king's courts. The following lively strain prepares us for the satire of Langland :—

Accedet ad te nuncius
Et loquitur discretius,
  Dicens, Amice care,
  Vis tu placitare?
Sum cum justitiario
Qui te modo vario
  Possum adjuvare,
  Si vis impetrare
Per suum subsidium.
Da michi dimidium
  Et te volo juvare.

Ad pedes sedent clerici
Qui velut famelici
  Sunt, donis inhiantes,
  Et pro lege dantes,
Quod hi qui nihil dederint,
Quamvis cito venerint,
  Erunt expectantes.

Sed si quædam nobilis,
Pulcra vel amabilis,
  Cum capiti cornuto
  Auro circumvoluto,
Accedat ad judicium,
Hæc expedit negotium
  Ore suo muto.[1]

thing is against good faith, whereby the people is aggrieved, namely, that the half of what is raised in the kingdom comes not to the king, since as he does not get it all, as it is given, the people is forced to pay the more, and is thus straitened. For all the taxes are not given to the king. Another thing grievous to simple people is the collection of wool, which makes them commonly sell their goods; nor can it be that such counsel is pleasing to God, thus to destroy the poor by a bitter burden. It is not a sound law that the king should have my wool. Again, it is against the peace, as folk testify, that they keep back by force two parts or three in the sack. For whom shall this wool remain? Some answer that neither the king nor the queen will have it, but only the collectors. So false a weight of wool is surely a bitter thing. Since it is the king's will to take so much, he might have found enough among the rich, and in my opinion he would have done better to have taken a great part from them and to have spared the poor. He who takes the money of the poor without cause commits sin.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 183.

[1] A messenger will come to you and say to you discreetly, "Dear friend, do you wish to plead? I am one who may help you with the justice in various

A very noticeable feature in the popular songs, written between the reigns of John and Edward II., is the absence of that indignation against the religious orders which finds utterance in English poetry after the middle of the fourteenth century. With the exception of a few side strokes at the tastes of the abbots for hawking and hunting,[1] and at the eagerness of the friars to enrich their order,[2] the only attack on the regular clergy is a comparatively good-humoured satire on "The Order of Fair-Ease," an imaginary society whose rules are framed by borrowing various points of luxury and loose living from the practice of the principal monasteries.[3] The chief objects of the poet's indignation are the feudal oppressors of the poor, or the bishops who show themselves backward in defending the liberties of the clergy from the exactions of king and Pope. This silence in regard to the sins of the monastery may partly be explained by the fact that the songs were generally written by the monks or the lower clergy. But it is mainly due to the comparison which the people themselves must have drawn between the charitable doles of the convent and the harshness of their landlords; and also to an instinctive perception in their minds that the centre of the constitutional struggle lay, for the moment, in the conflict between the court and the baronial party, rather than in that between the nation and the Pope.

By far the most remarkable political composition of the period is one written after the battle of Lewes, a kind of poetical pamphlet in which the author sets before his audience with the greatest cleverness the principles at stake on either side. Though his own sympathy is with the party of De Montfort, he states the case very fairly on behalf of the king:—

ways if you would win your suit by his aid. Give me half and I will give you my support. The clerks sit at the judge's feet, like hungry men, gaping for gifts, and giving it out for law that those who have given nothing, however quickly they come, will be kept waiting. But if a noble lady, beautiful and charming, with horns on her head all twisted with gold, comes to the court, she gets her business through quickly without opening her mouth.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 226.

[1] *Ibid.* p. 329. [2] *Ibid.* p. 331. [3] *Ibid.* p. 137.

En radicem tangimus perturbationis
Regni de quo scribimus, et dissentionis
Partium quæ prælium dictum commiserunt.
Ad diversa studium suum converterunt.
Rex cum suis voluit ita liber esse
Et sic esse debuit, fuitque necesse,
Aut esse desinerit rex, privatus jure
Regis, nisi faceret quidquid vellet; curæ
Non esse magnatibus regni quos proferret
Suis comitatibus, vel quibus conferret
Castrorum custodiam, vel quem exhibere
Populo justitiam vellet, et habere
Regni cancellarium thesaurariumque.
Suum ad arbitrium voluit quemcumque,
Et consiliarios de quacunque gente,
Et ministros varios se præcipiente,
Non intromittentibus se de factis regis
Angliæ baronibus, vim habente legis
Principis imperio, et quod imperaret
Suomet arbitrio singulos ligaret;
Nam et comes quilibet sic est compos sui,
Dum suorum quidlibet quantum vult et cui
Castra, terras, redditus, cui vult committit,
Et quamvis sit subditus rex totum permittit.
Quod si bene fecerit, prodest facienti,
Si non ipse viderit, sibimet nocenti
Rex non adversabitur. Cur conditionis
Pejoris efficitur princeps, si baronis
Militis et liberi res ita tractantur?[1]

[1] Lo! we touch the root of the disturbance of the kingdom whereof we write, and of the strife of the parties who have joined battle. Each aimed at different objects. The king and his side wished to be free after this manner, and said that he ought and must, or that he would cease to be a king, if deprived of the right of a king to do as he would; that it was no business of the magnates of the kingdom whom he advanced to his earldoms, or on whom he conferred the charge of his castles, or whom he appointed to do justice to the people, or to hold the chancellorship and treasury of the realm. He would have whom he would at his will, and counsellors of any nation, and his various ministers according to his discretion, without any interference of the barons of England in the affairs of the kingdom, since the king's command has the force of law, and all that he pleases to order is binding on each of his subjects. For even an earl is so master, each in his own territory, giving of his own whatever, and how much he will, and committing to whom he will castles, lands, revenues, and, subject though he be, the king trusts everything to his hands. If he does this well, so much the better for him; if not, let him see to it himself; the king will not oppose his injuring himself. Why is a prince to be worse off, when the affairs of a baron, a knight, nay, of a freeman, are thus managed?—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 96. It will be observed that this is precisely the principle of feudal independence which is recognised in the code of St. Louis.

Having thus stated the argument of the king's party, he turns to the other side :—

> Sed nunc ad oppositum calamus vertatur,
> Baronum propositum dictis subjungatur,
> Et auditis partibus dicta conferantur
> Atque certis finibus collata claudantur,
> Ut quæ pars sit verior valeat liquere :
> Veriori pronior populus parere.[1]

The following lines, taken out of a long pleading, may be regarded as summing up the case for the barons :—

> Igitur communitas regni consulatur,
> Et quid universitas sentiat sciatur
> Cui leges propriæ maxime sunt notæ ;
> Nec cuncti provinciæ sic sunt idiotæ,
> Quin sciant plus cæteris regni sui mores
> Quos relinquunt posteris hi qui sunt priores.
> Qui reguntur legibus magis ipsas sciunt,
> Quorum sunt in usibus plus periti fiunt,
> Et quia res agitur sua plus curabunt,
> Et quo pax adquiritur sibi procurabunt.[2]

When a political idea of this kind—expressed, it is true, in mongrel and scholastic verse—can be put forward, it is plain that a nation, whatever its internal dissensions may be, must have attained a clear sense of its own life and unity. From the consciousness of freedom to the pride of patriotism is but a step. It is therefore not surprising, in the first half of Edward III.'s reign, to find the songs and satires against the great replaced by others expressive of national exultation. In the brilliant exploits of the king and his son the English people saw a reflection

[1] But now let the pen turn to the opposite side, and let the case of the barons be added to what has been said ; and when the parties have been heard, let their words be compared, and a conclusion be arrived at from the premises, so that the truer side may prevail : the people is always more inclined to obey the truer view.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 98.

[2] Therefore let the commons of the kingdom be consulted ; and let it be known what is the general feeling of those who best know their own laws ; nor are all those of the country so inexperienced as not to know better than others the customs of their own kingdom, which are handed down from father to son. Those who are governed by the laws know most about them : those who use them are most skilled in them, and because their own business is at stake will take most care about it, and will consider for themselves what makes for their peace.—*Ibid.* p. 110.

of their own prowess, and the national pride was heightened by the knowledge of the great part the Saxon bowmen had played in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. As a mirror of this feeling, some interest may still be found in the poetry of Laurence Minot (1333-1352), though it is otherwise devoid of merit, being in point of diction and metre no more than a variation of the class of romances satirised in Chaucer's "Sir Thopas." A generation earlier Minot would have told interminable tales of Guy of Warwick or Sir Gawain, but now he takes for his subject the adventures of "Sir Edward" in his wars with "Sir Philip" and "Sir John." He recites the great deeds done by the king at Crecy, Tournay, and Calais. He finds in his victories the fulfilment of Merlin's prophecies, and constantly speaks of Edward under the figure of "the boar."[1] Had he recited in the reign of Edward II., it would have mattered little to him whether the legendary hero whom he might choose to celebrate were of English, French, or Danish birth; but now it is England against the world: the Scot has to be told that the defeat of Bannockburn is wiped out by the victory of Halidon Hill, or Neville's Cross; and the Frenchman is addressed in a tone of savage mockery—

Quite ertou, that well we knaw,
  Of catel, and of drewriss dere;
Tharfore lies the hert ful law
  That are was blithe als bird on brere.
  Inglis men sall ȝit to ȝere
Knok thi palet or thou pas,
  And mak the polled like a frere:
And ȝit es Ingland als it was.[2]

When we speak of the effects of the early Renaissance on English poetry, it must therefore be understood that

[1] Merlin said thus with his mowth,
  Out of the north into the sowth
  Suld cum a bare ouer the se.
    Minot, *Poems* (Hall's edition), p. 21.

[2] Thou art deprived, we well know, of chattels, and of dear delights; therefore thy heart, once blithe as bird on briar, lies full low. Englishmen shall still this year knock thy head ere thou go by, and make thee shaven as a friar; and yet England is as it was.—*Ibid.* p. 2.

the word is used in a special and limited sense, signifying the reappearance of the spirit of political liberty in a more distinct and definite form than had been witnessed since the days of the Greek and Roman republics. Rude and imperfect as is the vehicle of expression, the popular songs of England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reveal a consciousness of united purpose and corporate pride in the nation, for which no contemporary parallel can be found in any other country of Europe, and which arises from political conditions of the kind that gave birth to the oratory of Pericles and Cicero. The time had not yet come for England when the masterpieces of ancient literature could exercise a refining influence on the efforts of her native genius. In this respect her early writers lag behind those of France and Italy. Here and there traces may be observed in the Latin songs of an appreciative study of the classics,[1] and of a revolt of the practical English mind against the futilities of the later scholastic logic.[2] But there is no sign of a reverence for the authority of the ancient philosophers; no attempt to utilise the resources of pagan mythology, like that which we encounter in almost every page of the *Divine Comedy* or the *Romance of the Rose.* These features do not appear in English poetry till the time of Chaucer, and in him they are the fruits rather of the imitation of Boccaccio and John de Meung, than of the direct influence of classical literature. What is really "classical," in this embryonic English art, is a certain direct manner of looking on Nature, Man, and Society,

[1] A song on the Scottish wars is written in rhyming stanzas, the last verse of which is an hexameter, as often as not quoted from a standard Latin author. For example :—

> Invido nil nequius nullus est qui nescit;
> Nam de bono proximi dolor ejus crescit:
> Unde justus proficit hinc ipse tabescit,
> Sincerum nisi vas quodcunque infundis acescit.
>
> Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 161.

[2] A song against the scholastic studies depreciates Logic in comparison with Law and Medicine—

> Naturæ cognoscere si velis arcana,
> Stude circa physicam quæ dat membra sana:
> Sat quidquid expostulat egestas humana,
> Sat Galienis opes et sancti Justiniani.
>
> *Ibid.* p. 210.

the result of political as opposed to scholastic education, a compounded view of the relations of Church and State, emerging from the conflict of opposite extremes. The foundations thus formed showed themselves capable in after ages, as Burke says, of admitting all the improvements of art and refinement, and gave scope for that admirable variety of poetical architecture exemplified in the work of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Pope, which is the characteristic glory of English literature.

## CHAPTER VI

### LANGLAND

In certain aspects of his genius the author of *The Vision concerning Piers Plowman* may be regarded as the Nævius of English poetry. He bears an obvious resemblance to Nævius in his literary aims. As the Latin poet sought to maintain the use of the Saturnian measure against the invasion of Greek models, prophesying that after his death the Camenæ would bewail him as the last to speak the Latin tongue, so Langland strove deliberately to revive the alliterative verse of his Saxon ancestors, which most of his contemporaries had set aside in favour of French rhyme. He resembles Nævius also in his imaginative conservatism. Religious rites, family traditions, the customs of the soil, the institutions of the State, took no stronger hold on the mind of the Roman, than the schooling of the English Church, preserved through so many generations of monastic life, on the genius of the visionary of the Malvern Hills. In Langland's poem are combined Cædmon's reverence for the text of Scripture, Cynewulf's love of riddles, Richard of Hampole's spiritual theology, Robert of Brunne's practical common sense, all blended with that spirit of allegorical interpretation which had moulded the system of ecclesiastical training since the days of Gregory the Great.

Here, however, the parallel ends. Nævius in Latin literature was the champion of a dwindling and decaying cause. No individual force—and the genius of Nævius

was not inconsiderable — could have made the meagre forms of native Latin art an adequate instrument of expression for the greatness of the Roman spirit. But *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, in spite of its archaic style, is a classic work in English literature. From the moment of its first appearance it made a deep impression on the national imagination, and one generation of English writers after another has testified to its undiminished influence. A tribute to its power, direct or indirect, is paid in the pages of Chaucer, of Gascoigne, of Spenser, of Shakespeare, of Drayton, of Milton, of Bunyan ; nor is this long-sustained influence difficult to explain, for not only does the poem "show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure," but it furnishes an abstract of one side of our national history. While Chaucer by his art has left an imperishable image of social life in the fourteenth century, Langland's vigorous satire, vivid powers of description, strong sense of justice, so faithfully reflect the conscience of the English people, that his *Vision* often seems to be projecting its light upon the ethical problems of our own day.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the two great principles on which society in the Middle Ages rested, Catholicism and Chivalry, reached their grand climacteric, and sank into rapid decay. The steady exertion of spiritual authority by Innocent III. over temporal sovereigns was exchanged for the spasmodic violence of Boniface VIII. ; and, by the removal of the Papal court from Rome to Avignon, the sovereignty of the Catholic Church was deprived of much of its historical prestige. Shorn of its moral influence, the germs of corruption inherent in the system spread with fearful swiftness, and the sin of simony, manifested by the sale of pardons, indulgences, and benefices, established itself in the very heart of the Church. Thence the poison was diffused through every country in Europe, and particularly in England, where the policy of the Conqueror, by removing the bishops from the Hundred Courts, had tended to make the clergy the subjects

of two sovereigns. On the one hand they insisted on their exemption from the ordinary law of the land, or at least that their offences should be judged in their own courts by men of their own order; on the other hand they were themselves exposed to injustice from the Pope's claim to fill vacant benefices with his nominees.

Nor was Catholicism affected only by the corruption of the Popes; the whole moral and intellectual machinery of the system was weakened by the deterioration of the mendicant orders, and by the decline of the Schoolmen. So long as the preaching friars observed the high standard of discipline imposed upon them by St. Dominic and St. Francis, the Pope could command the service of spiritual armies, whose ascetic piety impressed the minds of the common people in every country. But when this strict rule was relaxed, and the people frequently observed a startling contrast between the high professions and the lax practice of the friars, the reaction from reverential admiration was proportionately strong. For a time, too, the supremacy of the Pope was fortified by the great intellectual eminence of the Franciscan and Dominican doctors, who acquired a practical monopoly of the chairs in the universities of Paris and Oxford. Thomas Aquinas, by harmonising the authority of the Fathers with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, had given to the Catholic system, of which the Pope was the exponent and the head, the appearance of impregnable logic, resting on a moral and metaphysical foundation. But in the hands of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham the great educational scheme, the ethical and spiritual aspect of which, in the works of the elder Schoolmen, inspired the genius of Dante, was changed into a mere instrument of subtle dialectic, and was sometimes even used as an engine for undermining the theory of Papal supremacy. From these unprofitable studies energetic minds turned to the more remunerative schools of Law and Medicine, or to imaginative research in the sphere of alchemy and astrology.

Chivalry had not less seriously declined from its high ideal. By its generous recognition of the social tie existing between the powerful and the feeble, by its close alliance with religion, and, above all, by the devotional feeling inspired in the Crusades, the true conception of knighthood had enshrined itself in the affections of the people. Long after the symbolism associated with the order had ceased to have any practical meaning, the poets continued to present the image as the type of all that was noble and exalted. They recalled the girding of the sword of righteousness on the thigh, and the bathing of the body of the new-made knight in token of purification from forbidden actions.[1] They personified knighthood, symbolising doubtless the great council of vassals, as the chief adviser of the king.[2] The purpose of the institution they conceived to be, at home the maintenance of order and justice, and abroad the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. These various aims and aspirations had indeed been part of the necessary code of chivalry, so long as justice was mainly administered in the manorial courts, and while Europe was united in the prosecution of the Crusades. But as the several European states began to form separate conceptions of their respective interests, as the central authority of the king established itself in the sphere of law and justice, and as the ardour of religious enthusiasm cooled, the moral and political functions of knighthood were gradually curtailed, and its activity was confined within a sphere in which the petty tyrannies springing out of its privileges were often more conspicuous than its virtues. Even during the reign of Edward I. in England the lustre of the character of that great and knightly king was insufficient to reconcile his poorer subjects to the burdens under which they

[1] Accingatur gladio super femur miles,
Absit dissolutio, absint actus viles;
Corpus novi militis solet balneari
Ut a factis vetitis discat emundari.
Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 167.

[2] *Piers Plowman*, "Thanne cam a kyng · knighthode hym ladde."

groaned.[1] The "evil times" of his son, with the disgraceful defeat of Bannockburn, and the perpetual dissensions of the nobility, went far to destroy the feeling of the people in favour of the institution of chivalry.[2] But in the reign of Edward III. a reaction set in. The energetic character and military skill of the king, largely employed as it seemed in defence of the common interest, dazzled the eyes of a nation rapidly increasing in wealth and prosperity, and becoming daily more sensible of its important position in the economy of Europe. Knight and yeoman had an equal share in the glory of Crecy and Poitiers; so that during the first half of the king's long reign the people pleased themselves with the illusion of reviving knighthood.

The illusion was intensified by the extraordinary splendour with which the luxury of the times disguised the internal decay of the institution. Edward III. restored the Round Table, and tournaments were the chief amusement of his court. Crowded with knights blazing in steel armour, their shields impaled with the various heraldic colours, their close-fitting overcoats embroidered with armorial bearings which were repeated even on the caparison of their horses, these gatherings presented a marvellous show of brilliant pageantry.[3] From the tilting field luxury of apparel passed into ordinary domestic life. Law after law was passed in Edward III.'s time in the hope of restraining it, but in vain, and the fashion reached its height under Richard II. That king is said by Holinshed[4] to have "had one

[1] See Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 182. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 258, 262, 323.

[3] The writers of the metrical romances are never wearied in their recital of the minutest details of their heroes' attire. Hence Chaucer, wishing to ridicule them, is equally particular in his account of Sir Thopas—

> He did next his white lere
> Of cloth of lake fine and clere,
> A breche and eke a shirt,
> And next his shirt an hakiton,
> And over that an habergeon
> For piercing of his heart;
>
> And over that a fine hauberk
> Was all wrought of jewes work,
> Full strong it was of plate;
> And over that his cote-armure
> As white as is the lily flure,
> In which he wolde debate.

[4] Cited in Fairholt, *Costume in England*, p. 134, note 3.

cote which he caused to be made for him of gold and stone, valued at 30,000 marks." All ranks and classes were equally eager to adorn their persons. The parish clerk, Absolon, in Chaucer's Tale, is dressed in red hose, a blue kirtle, and "with Paules windows carven on his shoes"; while of the monk who figures in the pilgrimage, the poet says—

> I saw his sleeves purfiled at the hand
> With gris, and that the finest of the land;
> And for to fasten his hood under his chin
> He had of gold y-wrought a curious pin.

Knights and squires, as early as the reign of Edward II., arrayed themselves in a fantastic garb which was felt to be quite out of keeping with their order:[1] their attendants were sumptuously clad, with the view of drawing attention to their own importance; and their extravagance was imitated by the inhabitants of the towns.[2]

That these excesses were not mere local incidents, but the result of a deep-rooted disease in the system of European order, is shown by their simultaneous appearance in Italy, France, and England. In each one of these countries during the thirteenth century a protest was made either in the form of poetical fiction, political revolt, or religious reaction against the corruptions of the age. Dante, in memorable passages of his *Divine Comedy*, contrasts the simple living of ancient Florence with the luxury of his own times;[3] points out by the mouth of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure the backslidings of the mendicant orders;[4] and reserves one of the lowest circles of the Inferno for the punishment of simoniacal clerks.[5]

[1] Now they are so disguised and diversely dight
Scarcely may men know a gleeman from a knight.
. . . Now in every toun
The raye (stripe) is turned overthwart that should stand adoun;
They ben disguised as tormentours that comen from clerkes play (*i.e.* like executioners in a miracle-play).
Wright, *Political Songs*, pp. 335-36.

[2] Harding says in his *Chronicle*:—

> Cut work was great both in court and towns,
> Both in men's hoods and also in their gowns,
> Embroidery and fur and goldsmiths' work all new
> In many a wyse each day they did renew.

Compare also Holinshed, *Chronicles*, vol. iii. 508.

[3] *Paradiso*, xv. 97. [4] *Ibid.* xi., xii. [5] *Inferno*, xix.

The recollections of the teaching of Arnold of Brescia, combined with the doctrines of the Fraticelli, bore practical fruit in Rome, where for a moment the rule of Orsini and Colonna was suppressed by the tribune Rienzi. Curiously, but characteristically, no French poet seems to have raised his voice against the intolerable exactions and exaggerated luxury which, in France as in England, attended the decay of feudalism. The savage satire of John de Meung was followed by an ominous silence; on the other hand the mantle of the sentimental William de Lorris fell to a worthy successor in the person of William de Machault, of whom more must be said hereafter. Machault's followers continued the trickling stream of conventional love-poetry through the Hundred Years' War with England. The artificial nature of their inspiration is the more apparent, in view of the real forces which were at work in French society, as manifested both in the extraordinary revivalism of the Flagellants and in the brute uprising of the Jacquerie.

In England the reaction against Papalism and Feudalism led to more positive political results. For the first twenty years of Edward III.'s long reign the tide of victory and prosperity flowed smoothly on. But in 1348 England, in common with all other European countries, was exposed to the terrible ravages of the Black Death, which is said to have swept away half the population. When war was renewed with France the hitherto unvarying good fortune of the English seemed to have deserted them, and their army, in the act of besieging Paris, was assailed by a storm of rain and hail so terrible that Edward, as he witnessed the sufferings of his soldiers, rising in his stirrups, vowed to God to bring the war to an end, a vow which was accomplished in the Peace of Bretigny in 1360. Another visitation of the Black Death followed in 1361-62, and while it was still raging, a tempest of unequalled violence passed over the land, tearing up great trees by the roots, and levelling the tower of Norwich Cathedral. To reflective minds this succession of calamities appeared as the manifest judg-

ments of God to punish the pride of the people.[1] A spirit of humiliation and repentance, not confined as in France to extravagant sects like the Flagellants, but widely spread through society, took the place of national elation, and men began to contrast in themselves, as well as in others, the difference between their profession and their practice. The name of John Wycliffe now first appears; but some years before that reformer had developed his peculiar opinions, the deeper religious sense of the time embodied itself in the remarkable poem called *The Vision of Piers the Plowman.*

Of the personal history of the author of this poem nothing is known with certainty. The Christian name, which he assigns in the title of his poem to the seer of the *Vision*, is William, shortened in the text to "Wille," and two or three touches seem intended to be of the nature of a portrait. Thus he alludes to the tallness of his stature,[2] and his brusque and independent manners;[3] while from one curious passage, evidently autobiographical, we gather that for some time he lived in Cornhill and followed the fashions of the Lollards.[4] It is plain from the character of his work that he must have received a clerical education, and if not himself one of the regular clergy, was at least thoroughly acquainted with the habits of the monastic orders.[5] Professor Skeat, the eminent editor of

[1] And thanne saw I moche more · than I before tolde,
For I say (saw) the felde ful of folke · that I before of seyde,
And how resoun gan arrayen hym · alle the reume (realm) to preche,
And with a crosse afor the kynge · comsed (commenced) thus to techen.
He preved that these pestilences · were for pure synne,
And the southwest wynde · on Saterday at euene
Was pertliche (plainly) for pure pryde · and for no poynt elles.
*Vision of Piers the Plowman*, Passus v. 9-15.

[2] He describes his own inward nature, or Thought, as resembling his outward man—
A moche (tall) man, as me thoughte · and lyke to my-selve
Come and called me · by my kynde (own) name.

[3] And some lakked (blamed) my lyf · allowed it fewe (few praised it),
And leten me for a lorel (held me as a worthless fellow) · and loth to reverence
Lordes or ladyes.

[4] Compare *Visio*, Passus vi. (C) 1-108.

[5] For if hevene be on this erthe · and ese to any soule
It is in cloister or in scole · by many skilles (arguments) I fynde.

his works, considers that there is evidence of his being a married man; and M. Jusserand, whose ingenious monograph on the *Vision* will be read with pleasure by all students, infers from his expressions that he was the son of a bondman. I confess that my own faith in these two supposed facts is weak;[1] but, on the other hand, there seems to be no reason why we should not accept the fairly good external evidence which assigns the authorship of the poem to William Langland, and makes him the son of one Stacy de Rokayle, while, from the poet's special reference to the Malvern Hills, it may be gathered that he was born in one of the Western Midland counties.[2] Nor do I think it at all unlikely that, as M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat suggest, he has left in his poem an anagrammatical clue to his own identity in the line—

"I have lyved in *londe*," quod I, "my name is *longe Wille*."

But however much the reader may regret that the personal records of a writer so remarkable should be so meagre and obscure, no one who has studied his work in itself can doubt that he was a man of profound religious conviction; that, by force of character and intellect, he was qualified to form a right judgment of man and society; that experience had acquainted him with the minutest details of the life which he described; and that—making allowance for the archaic vehicle of expression he adopted—he possessed all the genius, insight, and literary skill necessary to present his poetical conceptions in an artistic form.

[1] Professor Skeat relies on the line—

And called Kitte, my wyf · and Kalote, my doughter;

but it appears to me that these two names, inserted for the sake of alliteration, are no more likely to be those of real persons than "Daw, the dykere," or "Betoun, the brewster." M. Jusserand points to the phrase used by Holy Church in addressing the dreamer, "I received thee at the first and made thee a freeman;" but I think with Professor Skeat that these words probably refer only to the spiritual freedom given by the sacrament of baptism.

[2] Professor Skeat seems to be in doubt whether we ought not to accept a theory of the late Professor Pearson by which the author's name is made to be Langley instead of Langland. For my part I do not think it is desirable to introduce even the appearance of scientific reasoning into what must necessarily always remain a region of nebular hypothesis.

Like Dante and John de Meung, Langland made the framework of his poem the Vision which, since the model afforded by Boethius, had been accepted as a conventional form of art. But, for no very apparent reason, he conducts his action through a succession of dreams, and at different epochs he greatly altered and extended the design with which he originally started.[1] The first draft of the poem was made in 1361, and his conception, evidently the result of a deep sense of the disorders of the time, is mainly ethical and practical in its scope. It sets forth (1) the actual evils which ruin man and society; (2) the means of reformation; (3) the true theory of life. In 1377, the last year of Edward's reign, when the king was plainly sinking into his grave, and serious troubles were anticipated in consequence both of the tender age of the heir apparent, and the predominance of John of Gaunt, the poet revised his work. Preserving the substance of what he had originally written, he made many important additions, and so greatly expanded the last portion, relating to the true theory of life, that the length of the poem was more than doubled. Finally, in the last years of Richard II. he produced another revised edition, with fresh passages of an autobiographical nature, and with retrenchments and transpositions of the original matter, which showed his critical capacity to be as great as his powers of invention. By far the most interesting and artistic part of the *Vision* is the first eight Passus or Fyttes, and I therefore propose to give the reader a somewhat full account of their contents, noticing more briefly the Vita of Do-Wel, Do-Bet, Do-Best, in which, for various reasons, the poetical success is less conspicuous.

The poem opens with a description of the visionary wandering in the Malvern Hills, where he falls asleep and dreams a marvellous dream. He thought he was in a wilderness, to the eastward of which he beheld a tower on a hill, and beneath this a deep and doleful dungeon.

[1] The reader should consult the edition of the *Vision* published for the Early English Text Society by Professor Skeat, a noble monument of patient and scholarly research.

Between them was a fair field full of folk, each and all engaged in some line of action, of which the peculiarity was, that, in almost every case, it had diverged from its true purpose. Some indeed were industriously employed in ploughing and sowing, but only that their idle companions might waste the fruits of their labours. There were a few harmless minstrels, bent on making an honest livelihood, but most of this profession resembled the ribald story-tellers, whose loose tales in earlier times had provoked the indignation of Robert of Brunne and the author of *Cursor Mundi.* Pilgrims and palmers were journeying to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, that they might have the privilege of lying for the rest of their lives. Here and there a pious hermit was dwelling quietly in his retreat, but others were roaming about the country with companions by no means in keeping with the garb of sanctity. Friars of all the four orders were interpreting the text of Scripture in a sense agreeable to the low desires of their audience. A pardoner was proclaiming his commission from the Pope to give absolution, at a proper price, for breach of vows and fasts, and was sharing with the parish priest the money which should have gone to the poor. Bishops were devoting their energies to the secular work of the State instead of to the service of religion. The rule of the Church was given over to the cardinals at the Papal court, rather than to those to whom St. Peter had left it, the Cardinal Virtues. Then the dreamer beheld a king, led by knighthood, and acclaimed by the voice of the commons, who appointed ploughmen to provide the sustenance of the realm, while the rulers took thought for law and order. A lunatic kneeled before the king, praying that he might govern well; and then, as if at a coronation, Conscience (or, as it is in some versions, an angel) proclaimed with a loud voice, but in the Latin tongue, so that the unlearned might not dispute on the matter, a number of maxims on good government; while the commons replied in Latin verse, which few of them could construe: "Precepta regis sunt nobis vincula legis."

Thereupon it seemed to the dreamer that all the human figures disappeared from his vision, and a rout of rats and small mice rushed upon the scene, deliberating on the measures to be taken with the cat. A rat proposed that their enemy should be killed, but a mouse, "striding sternly forth," pointed out that, even if the cat were killed, another would come in its place. "I have heard my father say," continued the mouse, "that where the cat is a kitten, wretched is the court, and as the book of Ecclesiastes says, 'Væ terræ ubi puer rex est.' Better is a little loss than a long sorrow for most of us, though we get rid of a tyrant, for we mice should destroy many men's malt, and you rabble of rats would rend men's clothes, if there were no cat of the court to leap upon you; for if you rats had your will you could not rule yourselves. For my part I say that I see so much evil to come, that, by my counsel, neither cat nor kitten shall be harmed, and I will never pay my share of the collar." After this apologue, so vividly illustrative alike of the political situation and the character of the poet, and so prophetic of the approaching calamities of the kingdom, the dreamer resumes the vision of humanity, and closes his prologue with a view of the avarice of the lawyers, and the idleness and ill-living of the labouring classes.

Having exhibited his *dramatis personæ*, the dreamer proceeds to explain the meaning of his vision. A lovely lady descends from a castle, and shows him that the tower he had seen was Truth, the abode of God the Father. God gives all men enough, and the only three things really needful for them are clothes, meat, and drink. We are not to follow the instincts of the flesh, for that is under the influence of a lying spirit, but are to obey the rule of reason and common sense. The lady further shows him that the dungeon in the deep dale was the Castle of Care, the dwelling of the Father of Falsehood, who hinders Love and deceives all that trust in treasure. Then the dreamer asks the lady's name. "I," said she, "am Holy Church, who held thee at thy baptism, and taught thee thy creed, and thou gavest me pledges to

do my bidding, and love me loyally while thy life endureth." The dreamer begs that she will teach him, not how to get treasure, but how to save his soul. Holy Church replies that Truth is the best of treasures, and to follow Truth should be the aim of kings and knights, rather than to conform strictly to those outward rules of fasting and the like, which the ordinary oath of knighthood requires. Christ knighted Cherubim and Seraphim to know the truth and obey it; Lucifer and his angels fell through disobedience and are condemned to hell; but they who obey Truth and God's law may certainly hope for heaven. Still the dreamer urges that he has no natural knowledge of Truth; but Holy Church replies with severity that he should know it through conscience; that Truth is to love God better than himself, and to do no deadly sin. Truth tells us that Love is the medicine of Heaven, and that to love and pity the poor, and to comfort the sad, is the best way to heaven.

To complete his knowledge the dreamer prays his teacher to give him skill to know the false, whereupon she bids him turn his eyes to the left. He does so, and beholds a woman splendidly arrayed in rich garments and precious stones, and on his asking Holy Church her name, "That," she replied, "is Mede (Bribery) the maiden, my enemy. My Father is Almighty God, and every merciful man is my lord and husband. But Mede is to be married to-morrow to one False Fickle-tongue, and then you may see the whole crew that belong to that lordship." After which Holy Church leaves the dreamer, and the action of the allegory begins with the marriage, which is a satire of the most vivid kind on the corruptions of the civil and ecclesiastical courts. Every rank and condition of men connected with these courts is brought under the lash. The two chief offenders are Simony and Civil, representing civil and ecclesiastical corruption; but besides these there are bidden to the wedding the Sizours or Jurymen; the Summoners who cited offenders to appear in the Consistory Court; the Beadles who impanelled the juries; the For-goers and Victuallers, who were charged with the

execution of the hateful privilege of Purveyance. The first to bring Mede from her bower is Favel the flatterer, a broker of the class which in those days was employed in arranging treaties of marriage; and when the parties are ready, Liar produces a charter, whereby the various goods and possessions of Mede are granted to Falsehood. At the sight of these monstrous proceedings Theology waxes wroth, insisting that Mede ought to be married to Truth, and that before the marriage is consummated the parties must proceed to Westminster, to see whether the law will permit it. Simony and Civil assent to the proposal, but Favel prepares the way with florins, which he takes care to distribute to the scribes. Then follows a passage of remarkable humour and power, which seems to condense into a few lines all the complaints of the injustice of the times scattered through the political songs of the preceding reigns:—

Ac thanne cared thei for caplus · to kairen hem thider,[1]
And Favel sette forth thanne · folus ynowe,[2]
And sette Mede upon a schyreve · shodde al newe,[3]
And Fals sat on a sisoure · that softlich trotted,
And Favel on a flaterere · fetislich[4] atired.
Tho haued notaries none[5] · annoyed thei were,
For Symonye and Cyuile · shulde on hire fete gange.
Ac thanne swore Symonye · and Cyuile bothe,
That sompnoures shulde be sadled · and serue hem uchone[6]
And lat apparaille this prouisores · in palfreis wyse;[7]—
"Sire Symony hymseluen · shal sitte upon here bakkes.[8]
Denes and suddenes[9] · draw yow togideres,
Erchdekenes[10] and officiales · and alle yowre Registreres,
Lat sadel hem with siluer · owre synne to suffre;

[1] But then provided they horses (caballos) to betake themselves thither.
[2] Foals enough.
[3] Set Mede on a sheriff newly shod.
[4] Handsomely.
[5] Then had the notaries none.
[6] That summoners should be saddled and serve each of them.
[7] And let provisors be apparelled in the fashion of palfreys.—The provisors were clerks who had a provision made them by the Pope for succession to a benefice during the lifetime of the holder. The statute of *Provisores* was directed against the abuse.
[8] Compare this cavalcade with what is said in the poem on the evil times of Edward II. (Wright, *Political Songs*):—

Covetyse upon his hors he wole be sone there
And bringe the bishop silver, and rounen (whisper) in his ere.

[9] Sub-deans.
[10] Archdeacons.

As auoutrye and deuorses[1] · and derne[2] usurye,
To bere bischopes about · abrode in visitynge.
Paulynes pryues[3] · for pleyntes in the consistorie
Shall serue my-self · that Cyuile is nempned ;[4]
And cartisadel the commissarie · owre carte shal he lede,
And fecchen us vytailles · at *fornicatores*.[5]
And maketh of lyer a long carte[6] · to lede alle these othere,
As Freres and faitoures[7] · that on here fete rennen."
And thus Fals and Fauel · fareth forth togideres,
And Mede in the myddes · and alle thise men after.

Soothness (Truth), however, marks the company on the road, and without saying anything pushes on and enables Conscience to give the king warning of their approach. The king, enraged at the news, declares that if he could catch Falsehood and Favel he would hang them both. Dread, hearing his exclamation at the door, conveys a friendly warning to Falsehood and his followers, who scatter in confusion. Guile is sheltered by tradesmen, and Liar, after being forced for a long time to lurk in by-lanes, is taken in, washed, clothed, and entertained by Pardoners, and afterwards by Friars.

Mede, who has thus been left alone, is brought before the king in his chamber at Westminster, and the latter expresses his intention of forgiving her if she conforms to his wishes. The justices and clerks go to wait upon her with many offers of assistance, and on promising to glaze a window in the monastery, she is duly absolved of her sins by a confessor in the garb of a friar. She is then courteously asked by the king whether she is prepared to amend her ways and to wed Conscience, one of his knights. As she declares her willingness to do so, Conscience is called by the king, and asked whether he will take her to wife. He flatly refuses, and sets forth Mede's whole manner of life ; how she releases the guilty, throws the just into prison, and hangs the inno-

[1] Adultery and divorces. [2] Secret.
[3] Confidential men of the Paulines—*i.e.* the Crutched Friars.
[4] Whose name is Civil.
[5] Harness the Commissary (Judge in the place of the Bishop) ; he shall draw our cart and provide food for us at the expense of adulterers—referring to the practice of exacting fines for sins from rich people.
[6] Make of Liar a long cart. [7] Impostors.

cent; how she gets absolution when she pleases; how, as the *provisors* show, she is privy with the Pope; how she lets priests live in concubinage, corrupts the judges, and makes it difficult for the poor to get justice, in consequence of the law's delays. Mede, being called upon for her defence against these charges, makes, it must be admitted, an extremely able speech. Beginning with an invective against Conscience, whom she accuses of cowardice in persuading the king to the Treaty of Bretigny, she goes on to show how necessary the intervention of Mede is in all the relations of life, between master and servant, king and subject, priest and people, buyer and seller; indeed, so powerful is her argument, that she persuades the king she is well worthy to rule. Conscience, however, has not studied logic in the schools for nothing, and proves himself quite a match for Mede, whose fallacies he exposes point by point. There are, he shows, two kinds of Mede, one the just reward for service, the other the price of misdoing. What labourers receive is not Mede, but wages; in merchandise there is no Mede, but exchange; priests no doubt must be maintained, but those who take money for masses look for their Mede in this world. As for kings, we see the mischief that Mede did to Saul when he made war on Amalek. The teller of truth, says Conscience, is now the first to be blamed; but it shall not always be so, and he winds up his argument with a fine vision of the Golden Age, resembling the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil and the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah:—

"I, Conscience, knowe this · for kynde witt[1] me it taughte,
That resoun shall regne · and rewmes governe;[2]
And righte as Agag hadde · happe shal somme.[3]
Samuel shal sleen hym · and Saul shal be blamed,
And Dauid shall be diademed · and daunten hem alle,
And one Cristen kynge · kepen hem alle.
Shal na more Mede · be maistre, as she is nouthe,[4]
Ac loue and lowenesse · and lewte[5] togederes,
Thise shal be maisteres on mold[6] · treuthe to saue.

[1] Common sense.
[2] And govern kingdoms.
[3] And some shall fare just as Agag did.
[4] Now.
[5] Loyalty.
[6] On the earth.

And whoso trespasseth ayein treuthe · or taketh ayein his wille,
Leute shall don hym lawe · and no lyf elles.[1]
Shal no seriaunt[2] for her seruyse · were a silke howue,
Ne no pelure[3] in his cloke · for pledyng atte barre.
Mede of mys-doeres · makyth many lordes,
And ouer lordes lawes · reuleth the rewmes.[4]
Ac kynde loue[5] shal come yit · and Conscience togideres,
And make of lawe a laborere · suche loue shal arise,
And such a pees amonge the peple · and a perfit trewthe,
That jewes shal wene in here witte · and waxen wonder glade,
That Moises or Messie · be come into this erthe,
And have wonder in here hertis · that men beth so trewe.
Alle that bereth baslarde[6] · brode swerd or launce,
Axe other[7] hachet · or eny wepne ellis,
Shal be demed to the deth · but if he do it smethye[8]
In-to sikal or to sithe · to schare or to kulter;[9]
*Conflabunt gladios suos in vomeres etc.*
Eche man to pleye with a plow · pykoys[10] or spade,
Spynne or sprede donge · or spille hym-self with sleuthe."[11]

Mede has now no argument left but misquotation of Scripture. Solomon, says she, declares in the Book of Wisdom that they that give gifts win the victory and obtain honour—*Honorem adquirit qui munera dat.* But Conscience, whose memory is as good as his logic, at once reminds her that she has left out the last part of the text—*Animam autem aufert accipientium:* "He that giveth a gift shall have honour, but the soul of them that receive it is bound thereby."

Although Conscience would seem to have fairly worsted Mede in argument, yet the king is still apparently unconvinced. He bids the parties be reconciled. Conscience, who represents the right disposition of the heart, rather than Philosophy, declines to submit unless Reason assents, whereupon the king commands him to fetch this councillor to court. Reason, when summoned by Conscience, bids his man Cato[12]

[1] Loyalty shall judge him and no other creature.
[2] Serjeant at law. [3] Silk hood; nor fur.
[4] Mede makes many misdoers into lords, and rules the kingdom, superseding the law of the lord. [5] Natural love.
[6] Dagger. [7] Or. [8] Unless he beat it at the smithy.
[9] Ploughshare or coulter. [10] Pickaxe. [11] Or ruin himself with sloth.
[12] An allusion to the *Disticha de Moribus* of Dionysius Cato, a book of the highest authority in the Middle Ages.

saddle his horse Suffer-till-I-see-my-time, on which he sets out for court with his friend. On the way they observe riding behind them two men of law, Garyn (Wary) Wisdom, a character resembling Bunyan's Worldly-Wiseman, and Witty or Policy, who are riding post-haste to the king, lest Reason should get an advantage over them. Arrived at court Reason is graciously received by the king, who places him between himself and his son, and a scene follows which is evidently intended to paint the actual corruptions of justice, as the preceding Passus had been devoted to the exposure of the unjust motives which sway men's hearts. Peace comes into court and presents a bill, one of those petitions by which the commons, in the infancy of Parliament, were accustomed to obtain remedies for grievances. The bill is put forth against Wrong, and illustrates the evils caused by the privilege of Purveyance—

"Both my gees and my grys · his gadelynges feccheth ;[1]
I dar nought for fere of hym · fyghte ne chyde.
He borwed of me Bayard · he broughte hym home neuere,[2]
Ne no ferthyng ther-fore · for naughte I couthe plede.
He meyneteneth his men · to morther myne hewen,[3]
Forestalleth my feyres · and fighteth in my chepynge ;[4]
And breketh up my bernes dore · and bereth aweye my whete,
And taketh me but a taile[5] · for ten quarters of otes."

Wrong, alarmed at this accusation, secures the services of Wary Wisdom and Witty, who take Mede with them, but the king orders Wrong to be put into irons, and refuses to listen to the two men of law when they suggest that the accused should be bailed. Peace, the petitioner, is then pressed by Mede to be content with money compensation, and would have consented, had not the king shown himself inexorable. Reason's interest being asked for on behalf of the prisoner—

[1] His men fetch my geese and pigs.
[2] He borrowed my horse and never brought him home.
[3] He supports his men in murdering my labourers.
[4] He forestalls my fairs and interferes with my market.—The forestallers bought up commodities for the purpose of raising prices.
[5] He gives me nothing but a tally.—The old sign of a contract to pay. Tallies are still used in English hop-gardens at the time of picking.

"Rede[1] me noughte," quod Resoun, "no reuthe to have,
Till lordes and ladies · lovien alle treuthe,
And haten al harlotrye · to heren it or to mouthen it;
Tyl Pernelle's purfil · be put in here hucche;[2]
And children's cherissyng · be chastyng with yerdes;[3]
And harlotes holynesse · be holden for an hyne;[4]
Till clerken coueitise be · to clothe the pore and to fede,
And religious romares · *recordare* in here cloisteres,[5]
As Seynt Benet hem bad · Bernarde and Fraunceys;
And tyl prechoures prechyng · be preved on hemseluen;
Tyl the kynges conseille · be the comune profyte;
Tyl Bisschopes' Baiardes · ben beggares chambres,[6]
Here haukes and her houndes · helpe to pore Religious," etc.

Until this reformation is accomplished, says Reason, there should be no pity, and no wrong in this world should go unpunished, or be atoned for by gifts. At this Wary Wisdom winked at Mede,

And seide, "Madame, I am yowre man · what so my mouth jangleth
I falle in floreines," quod that freke · "an faile speche ofte."[7]

All good men, however, thought that Reason was right, and the king, being of the same opinion, rebuked his lawyers, declaring that all injustice should be punished. Conscience doubts that it will be hard to govern thus; but Reason, on the contrary, declares it will be easy, if the king be obedient to his rules, and Conscience be of the council.

"And I graunt," quod the kynge · "goddes forbode it faile,
Als long as owre lyf lasteth · lyue we togideres."

Here ends that part of the *Vision* which is more particularly directed to the exposure of the corruptions

[1] Advise.

[2] Till Purnell's fur be put away in her box.—The statutes against overdressing were strict.

[3] And children's spoiling be turned to chastening with rods.

[4] And the supposed high-breeding of ribalds be esteemed as that of a hind.

[5] And religious ramblers say mass in their cloister.—"*Recordare* is the first word in a mass for avoiding sudden death, the recital of which secured to the hearers two hundred days of indulgence."—Skeat.

[6] Till bishops' horses become beggars' chambers—*i.e.* till the money spent on horses be devoted to the poor.

[7] "Whatever arguments I use with my mouth, I fall in with a florin," quoth the fellow, "and then my speech fails me."

of the State: what follows has reference to the sins of individuals. When the king and his knights, after the trial of Mede, went to the church to hear matins, the dreamer woke, but he soon fell asleep again, and imagined himself to be listening to the sermon of Reason, already alluded to,[1] in which the preacher pointed to the manifest judgments of God sent upon the nation, and exhorted all men everywhere to repent. Moved by his eloquence, the Seven Deadly Sins come to confession, and are described one by one in passages of extraordinary dramatic power, revealing to the fullest extent the poet's gifts of imagination, observation, and judgment. Pride and Lechery are very roughly sketched; but in the confession of Envy, Wrath, Avarice, Gluttony, and Sloth, these passions exhibit their effects, in rapid transformation, on every rank and condition of men,—mostly of the lower classes,—with whom the writer is best acquainted. Thus Envy confesses that he would sooner see his neighbour Gybbe have mischance than get a pound of Essex cheese, and that he had hired Backbiting as a broker to depreciate his fellow-tradesman's wares. Wrath has lived at one time as gardener, and at another as scullion, in a convent, and has set the whole society by the ears. Avarice has mastered all the tricks of every trade, from the time when he learned the art of lying and false weights at Weyhill and Winchester fairs, down to the time when he began to lend to lords and ladies, and to acquire manors, through his debtors being in arrear with their payment. He knows how to clip coin, and how to lend it in exchange for valuable pledges; and his wife Rose the regrater (retail dealer) is well skilled to give under-payment for the weight of cloth she buys, and to adulterate poor people's drink. Glutton, on his way to confession, is tempted into the public-house, where he drinks, in company with Cis the shoemaker's wife, Wat the Warrener, Tim the tinker, Hick the ostler, and other choice spirits, to such an extent that he has to be put

[1] See p. 207, note 1.

to bed by his wife, and needs all Saturday and Sunday to sleep off the effects of his debauch.

As each sin comes to the close of his confession, Repentance rebukes and admonishes him, and informs him what he must do to obtain mercy and absolution. Then Hope seizes a horn and blows it with *Beati quorum remissæ sunt iniquitates*, and a vast crowd of penitents throng together, hoping to find Truth. Meeting one in pilgrim's dress, they ask if he has ever heard tell of a saint named Truth; but though he has been to Sinai, and to Bethlehem, and Babylon, he can tell them nothing of that shrine. Suddenly a ploughman puts forth his head—

"I knowe him as kyndely · as clerk doth his bokes;
Conscience and kynde witt[1] · kenned me to his place,
And deden me suren hym sikerly[2] · to serue hym for euere,
Both to sowe and to sette · the while I swynke[3] mighte.
I have ben his folwar · al this fifty wyntre;
Both ysowen his sede · and sued[4] his bestes,
With-inne and with-outen · wayted his profyt.[5]
I dyke and I delue · I do that treuthe hoteth;[6]
Some tyme I sowe · and some tyme I thresche,
In tailours crafte and tynkares craft · what treuthe can devyse,
I weue and I wynde · and do what treuthe hoteth.
For thoughe I seye it my-self · I serue hym to paye;
I haue myn huire of hym wel · and otherwhiles more;[7]
He is the prestest payer[8] · that pore men knoweth;
He ne withalt non hewe his hyre · that he ne hath it at euen.[9]
He is as low as a lombe · and louelich of speche,[10]
And if ye wilneth to wite · where that he dwelleth,
I shal wisse yow wetterly[11] · the weye to his place."

All the pilgrims press round the ploughman, whose name is Piers, proffering him money, which he refuses; he gives them, however, very minute instructions how to find the road to the wicket gate leading into Paradise, which, says he, is kept by seven sisters, Abstinence, Humility, Charity, Chastity, Patience, Peace, and Bounty,

[1] Common sense.
[2] And made me plight my troth to him surely.
[3] Labour.
[4] Followed.
[5] Watched his profit.
[6] What truth bids.
[7] Sometimes more than my due.
[8] The quickest payer.
[9] He withholds from no labourer his hire so that he shall not get it at even.
[10] He is meek as a lamb and pleasant of speech.
[11] I shall teach you truly.

in other words the Seven Christian Virtues, the exact opposites of the Seven Deadly Sins. Some of the pilgrims, especially a cut-purse and an ape-ward, declare that they can have no kindred there; but Piers reminds them that Mercy (the Virgin Mary) dwells there also, through whom they may get grace.

Having thus given his view of the corruptions of the State, of the sins of men, and of the cure for both kinds of evils, the poet proceeds to consider the duties of the various constituent portions of society. The pilgrims declare that they shall never find their way without a guide; whereupon Piers professes his readiness to lead them as soon as he has ploughed his half acre. Meantime all are to occupy themselves with some useful business: ladies are to sew chasubles and to comfort the needy and naked; the knight is to preserve Church and State from the disorders caused by wicked men; the rest are to help Piers in his ploughing, and as their reward are promised the right of gleaning in harvest time. Piers then makes his will in preparation for his journey, and sets all his labourers to work. Now, however, great difficulties begin. At nine o'clock in the morning Piers, leaving his plough, goes out to see what his workmen are doing, and finds some in the ale-house drinking and singing, while others are feigning infirmity in order to avoid the necessity of labour. "I will soon find out," says Piers, "whether you are telling the truth: Truth shall teach you to drive his team." Anchorites and hermits shall have only one meal a day; and the run-about recluse shall have nothing. An idle Frenchman insolently refuses to do his bidding, and Piers appeals for protection to the knight, whose courteous intervention being of no avail, the ploughman summons Hunger to his assistance. Hunger seized on the rebel, and so buffeted him that he looked like a lantern for ever after; while the other idlers, dismayed at his fate, all rushed to do their work. Piers is filled with compassion for their distress, but fears that they will fall again into evil ways when Hunger has once departed. He therefore asks his

terrible ally for advice before the latter departs, and Hunger counsels him to feed "bold, big beggars" with horse-bread and beans, while the really poor and afflicted are to be assisted, in view of the text, "Bear ye one another's burdens." In answer to Piers' question whether men can be compelled to work, Hunger refers to Genesis iii. 19, and to other passages of Holy Writ.

> Kynde witt[1] wolde · that eche a wyght wroughte
> Or in dykinge or in deluinge · or trauaillynge in preyeres,
> Contemplatyf lyf or actyf lyf · Crist wolde men wroughte.
> The Sauter seyth in the psaalme · of *beati omnes*
> The freke that fedyth hymself · with his feythful laboure
> He is blessed by the boke · in body and in soule.

Asked whether he can recommend any physic for the remedy of Piers and his servants, Hunger replies that they overfeed themselves, and that they should not eat till they are hungry. Piers having thanked him for his counsel, Hunger refuses to depart till he has dined; and the ploughman, professing that he can give him neither geese nor pigs, brings him cheese, curds, cream, oatcake, and bean bread, with parsley, leeks and cabbages, while the poorer classes contribute peascods, beans, and cherries. When Hunger still demanded more they sought to poison him with young onions and peas, but after a good harvest they fed him with the best; beggars would touch only the finest bread; labourers dined daily on fresh fish and flesh.

> And but if he be heighlich huyred · ellis wil he chyde,
> And that he was workman wroughte · waille the tyme,[2]
> Ayeines Cato's conseille · comseth he to jangle[3]
> *Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento.*
> He greueth hym ayeines God · and gruccheth ayeines resoun,[4]
> And thanne curseth he the kynge · and al his conseille after,
> Such lawes to loke · laboreres to greve.[5]
> Ac whiles hunger was her maister · there wolde none of hem chyde,
> Ne stryue ayeines his statut · so sternelich he loked.

[1] Common sense.

[2] If he be not paid high wages he will grumble, and bewail the hour that he was born a labourer.

[3] He begins to argue against Cato's precept.

[4] He grows angry with God and murmurs against Reason.

[5] Then he curses the king and all his council with him for providing such laws for the injury of labourers.

The poet in conclusion solemnly warns the working classes of the divine judgment coming upon them if they refuse to labour. Every line of this part of the poem is a vivid illustration of social life at the time of the Black Death and the great famines, of the habits of the villeins, and of the feelings of the people with regard to the Statute of Labourers.

Truth, hearing of the pilgrimage, sends Piers, and all who help him, a pardon. By this document kings and knights, who have done their duty in maintaining religion and order, are allowed to pass lightly through purgatory. Bishops who have observed both the laws, that is their duty to God and their neighbour, shall be placed with the apostles. Merchants, however, will not have plenary pardon, because they do not keep the holy days of the Church, and swear falsely for gain; they had better trade fairly, aid hospitals, repair bridges, give marriage portions to brides, help the poor, and put scholars to school. On hearing the terms of their pardon the merchants wept for joy; but the lawyers were more severely treated, because they took bribes. Honest and humble-minded labourers had the same pardon as Piers, but not the feigning beggar, the false hermit, or any of the "loller" classes. A priest asks to look at the pardon: it is all contained in two lines:—

> Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam,
> Qui vero mala in ignem eternum.—(St. Matt. xxv. 46.)

The priest says this is no pardon, and a dispute ensues between him and Piers, the noise of which awakes the dreamer, who finds himself mealless and moneyless on Malvern Hills. Reflecting on his dream, he cannot say how much weight should be attached to it, for Cato thinks lightly of dreams; nevertheless he often meditates on the dispute between Piers and the priest, and is of opinion that Do-Well is better than indulgences. He believes the Pope has power to grant pardon; but trusting to masses is very unsafe; and mayors and judges who break the ten commandments will find that pardons and provincial

letters, purchased from the Pope, will avail them little hereafter.

Finally the poet concludes :—

> For-thi I conseille alle cristene · to crye God mercy,
> And Marie his moder · be owre mene betwene,[1]
> Thet God gyue us grace here · ar we gone hennes,
> Suche werkes to werche · while we ben here,
> That after owre deth-day · Do-well reherce
> At the day of dome · we did as he highte.[2]

Up to this point all has been perfectly clear, consistent, and intelligible, because the poet has been working according to a settled plan. The allegory relates to the moral life of men, and it is represented in a definite scheme of poetical action. But having reached his ethical conclusion, it seems to have occurred to Langland that he must found his system of morals on a metaphysical basis, and he accordingly embarked on a new poem which he called *Vita de Do-Well, Do-Bet, Do-Best.* To analyse this sequel in detail would be foreign to the design of our history, especially as the poet himself seems to have often wandered aimlessly in the mazes of his thought. It will be seen, however, that his work falls naturally into three divisions, in the first of which he appears to be defining for his readers what is the true theory of moral action. The visionary falls in with Thought and Wit, and learns from them that Do-Well dwells in a castle called Caro (the Flesh), together with the Lady Anima (the Soul), the Constable Inwit (Conscience), and his five sons (the Senses). But no use is made of this allegory in the action, which is almost entirely occupied with long interviews between William and such personages as Study, Clergy, and Scripture, with whom he holds much dispute, without however being far advanced towards the discovery of Do-Well. He has also a vision of Fortune, Nature, and Reason, which lets us see the influence exercised on the poet's thought by the *Romance of the Rose.* Imagination afterwards appears to him and rebukes him for his impatience; while, finally,

[1] Be our Mediator. [2] As he commanded.

in company with Conscience and Patience, he falls in with one Activa Vita or Haukyn, the Active Man, whose coat —the only one in his possession—is covered with stains symbolical of the seven deadly sins. Haukyn, being duly instructed in his duties by Patience, repents, and bewails his sins; the noise wakes the dreamer and puts an end to this part of the vision.

The *Vita de Do-Bet* sets forth the spiritual life of the soul. The object of the dreamer is to discover the nature of Charity. He meets with Faith in the person of Abraham and Spes (Hope), who are in quest of Piers the Plowman, now become identical with Charity or Christ. A wounded man is discovered in the way; Faith and Hope pass by him; but the good Samaritan, or Piers Plowman, or Charity, binds up his wounds, leaving him to be attended at an inn called *Lex Christi.* Then follows a description of the jousting of Jesus, and his triumph over Death and Hell, the allegory being based on the text of the *Gospel of Nicodemus;* and with the news of Piers' victory, announced by the ringing of the Easter Bells, the dreamer is awaked and the second part of the *Vision* ends.

In the *Vita de Do-Best* the Saviour has departed from the earth, and henceforth Piers the Plowman typifies the life of the Christian Church. Christ's place is supplied by Grace, who makes Piers his ploughman, providing for his labour four oxen (the four Gospels), four "stottes" (bullocks or horses, the Four Evangelists), and four seeds (the cardinal virtues). Piers builds the House of Unity, but it is attacked by Pride, and in the concluding Passus of the poem Antichrist becomes master of the world. Conscience advises the world to come into the House of Unity; and Nature, hearing the address of Conscience, lets loose Disease upon mankind. Many perish. Eld bears Death's banner: Death strikes into the dust Popes and Kings: Eld attacks the poet himself: Death draws nigh to him: he cries to Nature, who advises him to take refuge in Unity; but, coming thither, he finds it besieged by seven giants (the Deadly Sins) and Antichrist. Flattery

(a friar) treacherously gains admission into the castle, and Conscience declares that he will become a pilgrim and go forth to seek Piers Plowman. "And then," says the poet, "he cried aloud for Grace, and I awoke." Thus the poem concludes in gloom and defeat.

Nothing can illustrate more vividly the universality of the forces which, in the fourteenth century, were undermining the fabric of the mediæval European order, than the fundamental likeness between the *Divine Comedy* and the *Vision of Piers Plowman.* On a superficial view indeed many features in the two poems stand out in vivid contrast. Writing half a century after the death of Dante, there is nothing to show that Langland had read, or even heard of, the work of his great predecessor. That work, with its sharp, clear-cut, and precise forms, with its constant allusions to particular places, persons, and events, offers as clear a mirror of Italian city life, as the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, so crowded with scenes of generic painting, so free from individual names and details, affords of the semi-barbarous society of feudal England. No less striking is the contrast between the persons of the two poets: the Florentine, of noble birth, deeply versed in all the art and science of his age, experienced in civil affairs; master of a beautiful and harmonious form of verse; the Englishman, the descendant perhaps of small landowners, bred in the monastic school, the observer of ditchers, hucksters, and cut-purses in country lanes and London alehouses, using as his poetical instrument the rude alliterative measure long neglected even by the Saxon minstrel.

For all this the two men find themselves face to face with the same social diseases; and the ideal remedy for these evils, which each suggests, proceeds from a similar method of imaginative reasoning. Both held that the corruptions of their time arose out of the confusion between the temporal and spiritual powers; both conceived that it was the duty of Church and State to pursue their separate objects in the closest alliance; each was a firm upholder of the monarchical principle; each believed that the true

image of social order was revealed in the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The divergence between their ideas was due to a difference in the local circumstances to which the ideas had to be applied. For Dante in Italy the force of anarchy embodied itself mainly in the avarice and temporal ambition of the Popes, and in the lawlessness of the feudal aristocracy; his ideal was a development of the system of Charlemagne, a constitution under which the Emperor, as successor of the Cæsars, should be responsible for the maintenance of that temporal order which, in its true form, is the offspring of the Divine Will.

Langland's conception of society is much less symmetrical and logical than Dante's, partly because it is less learned, but partly also because it is more practical. His ideal is in many respects a reflection of the actual order of things under which he himself lived. As regards the authority of the Pope, he seems not to have gone so far as Wycliffe. He draws a sharp distinction between the power and person of the Pope; and of the former he says:—

Now hath the pope powere · pardoun to graunte the peple
With-outen eny penaunce · to passen in-to heuene.
This is owre beleue · as lettered men us techeth.

But for wicked Popes he has no respect:—

And God amende the pope · that pileth holy kirke,
And cleymeth bifor the kynge · to be keper ouer crystene,
And counteth not though crystene · ben culled[1] and robbed,
And fynt folke to fyghte · and cristene blode to spille[2]
Ayene the olde lawe and newe lawe · as Luke there-of witnesseth,
*Non occides: mihi vindictam* etc.
It semeth by so · himself hadde his wille[3]
That he reccheth right noughte · of al the remenaunte.

In another highly ironical passage he questions the use of paying Peter's pence:—

[1] Killed.

[2] And finds folk to fight for him and spill Christian blood;—alluding to the employment of mercenary soldiers in the wars of Pope and Anti-Pope.

[3] If only he has his will.

I fynd payne[1] for the pope · and prouendre for his palfrey,
And I hadde neuere of hym · haue God my treuthe,
Neither prouendre ne parsonage · yut[2] of the popis yifte,
Saue a pardon with a peys of led · and two pollis amidde![3]
Hadde iche a clerk that couthe write · I wolde caste hym a bille,
That he sente me under his seel · a salue for the pestilence,
And that his blessyng and his bulles · bocches mighte destroye:
*In nomine meo demonia ejicient, et super ægros manus imponent et bene habebunt.*
And thanne wolde I be prest to the peple · paste for to make,[4]
And buxome and busy · aboute bred and drinke
For hym and for alle his · fonde I[5] that his pardoun
Mighte lechen a man · as I bileue it shulde ·
For sith he hath the powere · that Peter hymself hadde
He hath the potte with the salue · sothly as me thinketh:
*Argentum et aurum non est mihi; quod autem habeo, hoc tibi do; in nomine domini, surge et ambula.*
Ac if mighte of miracle hym faille · it is for men ben nought worthy
To have the grace of God · and no gylte of the pope.

Apart, therefore, from his respect for the representative of "Holy Church," it is plain that Langland's reverence for the persons of particular Popes was on a par with Dante's, who showed no hesitation in consigning Boniface VIII. to one of the lowest circles of the Inferno. On the other hand, both poets would have been shocked if, from their independence of judgment, it had been inferred that they were anything but complete believers in that Catholic faith of which the successor of St. Peter was the legitimate guardian.

As regards the temporal power, many passages in the *Vision* seem to show that Langland, like Dante, was an advocate of absolute monarchy, tempered only by the restraints of reason and religion. For example:—

And thanne come there a kynge · and bi his croune seyde,
"I am Kynge with croune · the comune to reule,
And holy kirke and clergye · fro cursed[6] men to defende,
And if me lakketh to lyue · by the lawe will I take it

[1] Bread. [2] Yet.
[3] Save a pardon with a piece of lead, and two heads in the middle of it—*i.e.* those of St. Peter and St. Paul.
[4] Then would I readily make paste for the people.
[5] If I found. [6] Wicked.

There I may hastloketh it haue · for I am hed of lawe ;[1]
For ye ben but membres · and I aboue alle.
And sith I am yowre aller hed · I am yowre aller hele,[2]
And holy cherche chief help · and chiftaigne of the comune.
And what I take of yow two · I take it atte techynge
Of *spiritus justicie* · for I jugge yow alle ;
So I may baldely be houseled · for I borwe neuere,
Ne craue of my comune · but as my kynde asketh."[3]
"In condicioun," quod conscience · "that thow konne defende,
And reule thi rewme in resoun · right wel and in treuth,
Take thow may in resoun · as thi lawe asketh,[4]
*Omnia tua sunt ad defendendum, sed non ad depredandum.*"

This absolutism, however, in Langland's mind, exists mainly in appearance, for he shows repeatedly that his political ideal is based upon the ecclesiastical conception of the Feudal System, whereby society was divided into three orders, *Oratores* (the Clergy), *Bellatores* (Knights), and *Laboratores* (Husbandmen). The king was the head of the Knights, and in this capacity he was bound to follow the advice of the council of his great vassals in all matters pertaining to the good of the realm. As the great landlord of the kingdom, his duty, in common with all other knights, was, as Piers the Plowman says,—

To kepe · holikirke and my-selue
Fro wastoures and fro wykkede men · that this worlde struyeth.

The knights themselves again had a moral duty to perform :—

"Ye and yit a poynt," quod Pieres · "I preye yow of more ;[5]
Loke ye tene no tenaunt · but treuthe wil assent.[6]
And thowgh ye mowe amercy[7] hem · late mercy be taxour,
And mekenesse thi mayster · maugre Mede's chekes,

[1] And if I need maintenance I will take it by law wherever I can most readily, for I am head of the law.
[2] And as I am head of you all, so I am the health of you all.
[3] So I may be absolved without hesitation, since I never borrow or beg of my commons, save as my nature requires.
[4] It is noticeable that in his final version, when Richard II. was misgoverning the country, the poet modified this principle to "thou mayst have what thou askest for as the law requires."
[5] Beside.
[6] Take care you harm no tenant unless truth assents.
[7] Fine them.

And thowgh pore men profre yow · presentis and yiftis
Nym it naughte, an auenture · ye mowe it naughte deserue ; [1]
For thow shalt yelde it again · at one yeres ende,
In a ful perilous place · purgatorie it hatte.[2]
And mysbede noughte [3] thi bonde-men · the better may thow spede ;
Thowgh he be thyn underlynge here · wel may happe in heuene,
That he worth worthier sette [4] · and with more blisse
Than thow, bot thow do bette [5] · and lyue as thow shulde ;
*Amice, ascende superius.*
For in charnel atte chirche · cherles ben yuel to knowe,[6]
Or a knighte from a knaue there · knowe this in thin herte."

Granting the observance of these indispensable religious and moral conditions, Langland was evidently well disposed towards the Feudal System and regarded it as the repository of all temporal power. The great cause of corruption, in his view, was the confusion of the powers of the State through the avarice and ambition of the ecclesiastical order. He is constant in insisting on the supreme authority of the king in all matters of justice, even where the interests of the Church are concerned. On this principle was based his famous prophecy of the Reformation and the destruction of the monasteries :—

Ac there shal come a kyng · and confess yow religiouses [7]
And amende monyales [8] · monkes and chanouns,
And putten hem to her penance · *ad pristinum statum ire.*

. . . . . .

And thanne shal the abbot of Abyndoun · and alle his issu for euere
Have a knokke of a kynge · and incurable the wounde.

. . . . . .

"Thanne is do-wel and do-bet," quod I, "*dominus* and knighthode."

He afterwards goes on to qualify this conclusion by showing from Scripture how hard it is for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But from a temporal point of view he shows that he considers wealth and high birth to be essential for the maintenance of knighthood:—

[1] Take it not lest perchance thou shouldest not deserve it.
[2] It is called purgatory.
[3] Injure not.
[4] He will be placed more worthily.
[5] Unless thou do better than he.
[6] Churls are known with difficulty.
[7] Monks.
[8] Nuns.

For made neuere kynge no knyghte · but he hadde catel to spende,
As bifel for a knyghte · or fonde hym for his strengthe ;
It is a careful knyghte · and of a caytive kynges makynge,
That hath no londe ne lynage riche · ne good loos of his handes.[1]

On the other hand all mischief, he thinks, proceeds from the attempts of the clergy, who ought to set an example of holy poverty, to emulate the splendour of knighthood :—

Ac now is religioun a ryder · a rowmer bi stretes,
A leder of louedayes · and a lond-bugger,
A priker on a palfray · fro manere to manere,
An heep of houndes at his ers · as he a lorde were.[2]
And but if his knaue knele · that shal his cuppe brynge,
He lowreth on hym, and axyth hym · who taughte hym curtesye ?
Litel had lordes to done · to yyve londe fram her heires
To Religious that haue no reuthe · though it reyne on here auteres.[3]

In the same way, as the reader will already have observed in the analysis of the *Vision*, the effects of Mede are represented as being most disastrous among the clergy of all orders—monks, friars, pardoners, archdeacons, parish priests, and the like—just because the pursuit of worldly goods by these men carried them farther from their religious profession than was the case with the laity.

But Langland's view of the temporal order of the State springs from, and is logically dependent upon, his scheme of spiritual life, out of which arises his fundamental conception of Piers the Ploughman. He makes this apparent at the very outset of his allegory, when Holy Church explains the phenomena of the Field Full of Folk. The field is life. All men are the children of Truth (God the Father), who has given us all things

[1] For no king ever made a knight unless he had property to spend, such as is proper to a knight, or he chose him for his strength. Wretched is the knight, and the making of a bad king, that hath no land or rich descent or good report of his might.

[2] Now is religion a rider, a wanderer in the streets, a holder of love-days, and a buyer of land ; a horseman going from manor to manor with a pack of hounds at his back as though he were a lord.—Love-days were days for the settlement of disputes by arbitration. Much injustice was often done to the poor at these institutions.

[3] Ill it becomes lords to leave away land from their heirs to monks who care not though the rain comes in on their altars.

really necessary to sustain life—clothes, meat, and drink. Hence the most essential class in society is the class of labourers (*laboratores*), which is accordingly appointed by the commons to provide the sustenance of the realm; and of this class Piers the Ploughman is a member. When he is first introduced to us, Piers is represented as a labourer of Truth, who, from his simple, honest, and straightforward character, is able to direct the other pilgrims on the way to his master's shrine. In company with the knight, he undertakes to do all that is necessary for the preservation of society:—

"Bi seynt Poule," quod Perkyn · "ye profre yow so faire,
That I shal swynke, and swete · and sowe for us bothe,
And other laboures do for thi loue · al my lyf time,
In couenant that thow kepe · holikerke and my-selue
Fro wastours and fro wykked men · that this worlde struyeth.
And go hunte hardiliche · to hares and foxes,
To bores and to brockes · that breketh adown myne hegges.
And go affaite[1] the faucones · wilde foules to kille;
For suche cometh to my croft · and croppeth my whete."
Curteislich the knyghte thanne · comsed thise wordes:
"By my power, Pieres," quod he · "I plighte thee my trothe,
To fulfil this forward · though I fighte sholde;
Als long as I lyue · I shal the mayntene."

Here we have, so to speak, the Feudal System in a nutshell. The labouring classes of all kinds appear prominently throughout the *Vision*, and their performances whenever they are mentioned are tested by the standard of Piers the Ploughman. Lazy, incompetent, or dishonest workmen are judged with no less severity than false hermits or hypocritical friars; famine and pestilence are just judgments sent upon them by God for the neglect of their duties. The first and second drafts of the *Vision* had appeared before the great uprising of the commons, and it is evident from the letter of John Ball to the commons of Essex that the poem was widely known.[2] But it could have had nothing to do with stirring up insurrectionary passions; for it is plain that, on the whole, Langland's sympathies were with the knightly classes, and that he even approved of the Statute of Labourers and the

[1] Train. [2] Skeat, *Piers the Plowman*, vol. ii. p. lv.

customary laws which made the condition of the "villein" class almost intolerable. Though he was most intimately acquainted with every detail of the life of labourers, both in town and country, his view of their state is not that of the political agitator, but of the moralist or man of religion. Toil and labour, he thinks, is the consequence of the fall of man; men may therefore be made to work, and there is no answering the argument of Hunger from Genesis iii. 19:—

"Ye, I bihote the," quod Hunger · "or ellis the bible lieth.
Go to Genesis the gyaunt · the engendrour of us alle;
*In sudore* and swynke · thow shalt thi mete tilye
And laboure for thi lyflode · and so owre lord hyghte.
And *Sapience* seyth the same · I seigh it in the bible,
*Piger pro frigore* · no felde nolde tilye,
And therefore he shal begge and bidde · and no man bete his hunger."[1]

Opposed at every point to the idle and dishonest labourer, Piers the Ploughman, when we first meet with him, is the type of the true-hearted workman, doing his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him, and therefore seeing Truth so clearly that he is able to show the way to all the wandering pilgrims of the world. In the latter part of the *Vision* the conception of the ploughman becomes much more metaphysical. The question arises, "What is the *Vita de Do-Bet?*" The answer, following the text of Corinthians i. 13, is Charity or Love. But who is Charity? asks the dreamer. "Without the help of Piers the Ploughman." is the reply, "thou canst never see his person."

And that knoweth no clerke · ne creature in erthe
But Piers the plowman · petrus, id est Cristus.

By one of those allegorical transformations which abound in the *Vision*, Charity then changes from a person into a tree, tended by Piers the Ploughman as gardener; and afterwards is again turned into the person of the Good Samaritan, who appears riding to a "joust in Jerusalem." Finally to this jousting—

[1] He would till no field; therefore he shall beg and pray, and no man shall remedy his hunger.

One semblable to the Samaritan · and some del to Piers the plowman,
Barfote on an asse bakke · botelees cam prikye,
With-oute spores other spere · spaklich he loked,
As is kynde of a knyghte · that cometh to be dubbed,
To geten hym gylt spores · or galoches y-couped.[1]

Thus the simple, truth-telling character of the honest "villein" is now transfigured into the meek and lowly person of the Redeemer; the ploughman assumes the attributes of the knight; and, to make the allegory still more subtle and refined, the new champion is represented not as being actually Piers the Ploughman, but as wearing his coat-armour, in other words, being incarnate in human nature. Nor is this the last of the transformations. When the Redeemer, having gained the victory in the jousting, has passed away from the earth, He leaves His Spirit to descend on Piers the Ploughman, who, now typifying the Christian Church, once more resumes his old elemental employment of ploughing and sowing; a fine stroke of art, whereby the unity of conception, underlying all the kaleidoscopic changes of the *Vision*, is clearly marked.

To sum up the points of agreement and difference between Dante and Langland—for this is the best way to appreciate the place occupied by the latter in English poetry—both poets present an image of the ideal or spiritual order of nature and human society, in striking contrast with the actual course of the world. In both of them this idea of truth is founded on the authority of Scripture, expanded and illustrated by the received doctrine of the Church. The *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, like the *Divine Comedy*, abounds in allusions to those sources of encyclopædic learning which constituted the science of the period. But Dante's conception was based on the metaphysical side of Catholic Christianity; Langland's on the ethical and practical side. The former, on the wings of imagination, dares to penetrate to the inmost recesses of

[1] One like the Samaritan, and in some degree like Piers the Ploughman, barefoot on ass's back, came riding without boots, without spurs or spear. Sprightly he looked after the manner of a knight who comes to be dubbed, to get him gilt spurs or slashed shoes.

Being, and in that region all his doubts and difficulties are resolved for him by the explanations of Beatrice or Theology. Thus initiated into the divine scheme of nature, Reason demonstrates to him infallibly, by the deductive method, what must necessarily be the true principle of political and social order. In other words, his ideas are those of the Florentine citizen, accustomed to the refined methods of civil government, and so well versed in the subtleties of the scholastic system, that all the laws and arrangements of the unseen world rest for him on a secure foundation of spiritual logic. The *Divine Comedy* is in poetry what the *Summa Theologiæ* is in Philosophy.

While Dante is in poetry the intellectual child of the Schoolmen, Langland has more affinity to that family of Christian thought which has, from the earliest times, endeavoured to translate the text of the Gospel as literally as possible into human action. From this unqualified assertion of Christian duty arose most of the sects condemned by the Church as heretical. Montanists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Fraticelli, Lollards, Anabaptists, unconnected with each other in their immediate origin, all bear on their face the evidence of their common descent from a single principle, namely, to act according to their own interpretation of the letter of Christ's precepts, without regard to the reserves of worldly experience. At once simple and mystical—simple because they acknowledge no authority beyond the plain words of Scripture, and mystical because they allow no merit to any action not proceeding from the state of Grace—they have constantly been brought into collision with constituted authority both in Church and State. On the other hand, from their lofty ethical standard, they have always exerted a powerful influence on society. They have, up to a certain point, enlisted as their followers not only enthusiasts, but philosophers, statesmen, soldiers, and other members of the professional classes, who, however exceptional may be their own spiritual experience, in practice direct their conduct by the rules of common sense.

Among those who felt their power was Langland, one

of those great and rare intelligences which, by uniting in themselves opposite qualities and experiences, are able to translate ideas into action. In him were embodied the characteristics which distinguished, on the one hand, the men of the Renaissance, and, on the other, the men of the Reformation; the moral earnestness of Bunyan and Milton, the practical sense of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Trained in the learning of the schools, he was not less intimately acquainted with all the standards of morals and manners accepted in the working world. While he had meditated, not without sympathy, on the doctrines of the Lollards and socialists of his time, he was far from approving of their practical conclusions; and he remained unmoved, equally by Wycliffe's views of Transubstantiation, and by John Ball's sermons on social equality. In common with the Franciscans, he exalts the virtues of poverty and charity, but he recognises that poverty is not a desirable condition for every order in the State; and though he preaches the gospel of love, his strongest denunciations are directed against the abuses of justice. Contrarily, while he upholds the existing hierarchy of society, he insists on the essential equality of men in the sight of God, and lays bare, with all the tremendous force of satire, the falsities and hypocrisies which corrupt the springs of social action. As he accepts without question the actual constitution of things, he makes no attempt to subject it to the test of any symmetrical logical ideal, and it is a characteristic feature of difference in the *Divine Comedy*, as compared with the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, that Dante's constant guide is Theology, while Langland's favourite abstraction is Conscience. So long as the dreamer follows the direction of this principle, and the plain scriptural teaching of Piers the Ploughman, he pronounces unhesitating judgment on the moral evils of his time: when, on the contrary, he seeks to examine the metaphysical foundations of the "Life of Do-Well," and puts himself for the purpose to school with such teachers as Wit, Thought, Study, and Clergy, he loses himself in a maze of doubt and bewilderment. In all this Langland shows himself a thoroughly representative Englishman.

These radical differences in the ideals of the two poets are reflected in their different methods of art. Both adopt the machinery of allegory, but put it to completely opposite uses. With Dante allegory is an integral part of his system of thought. Following the lead of St. Thomas Aquinas, he held that the visible universe and human society were images of the mind of God, and hence, in his system, every phenomenal object was a symbol of some form of existence in the real world of spiritual being. The entire scene and action of the *Divine Comedy* is placed in the universe invisible to mortal eyes, but all the knowledge of astronomy and optics possessed by Dante is pressed into his service to describe the objects there revealed to him. Each of the planets, for example, is represented as being peopled with the souls of the blessed, but the poet is careful to explain that this supposed distinction of abode must not be taken to signify a real separation, but merely to convey a spiritual idea to the mind by means of a sensible image.[1] In the same manner, when, in company with Beatrice, he enters the Empyrean Heaven, he relates how he beheld "a light in form of a river radiant with rays between two banks painted by a wondrous spring, wherefrom issued living sparks, and from all sides settled in the flowers like rubies set in gold." Beatrice, however, warns the poet not to mistake these objects for what they appeared, since, she says, "the river and the topazes that enter it and issue from it, and the smile of the herbage, are but shadow-bearing prefaces of the truth; not that in themselves the things are hard, but there is a defect on your side, who have never yet seen sights of such splendour."[2] Each feature in the topography of the poem and all its *dramatis personæ*, are symbolical of some hidden truth. Thus Purgatory is the exact antipodes

[1] Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno,
Perocchè solo da sensato apprende
Ciò che fa poscia d' intelletto degno.
Per questo la Scrittura condiscende
A vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
Attribuisce a Dio, ed altro entende.
*Paradiso*, iv 40-45.

[2] *Ibid.* xxx. 61-81.

of Jerusalem: the seven stairs of Purgatory correspond to the seven deadly sins: the seven planets are correlative with the seven liberal sciences: Leah and Rachel, the Countess Matilda and Beatrice, typify respectively the active and contemplative life of man. I can recall but few impersonations of abstract qualities by Dante:[1] on the contrary, even when he describes himself as being in a vision, if he wishes to symbolise the deadly sin of sloth, he employs the image of a siren; and, when he intends to signify Imperial justice he introduces an eagle, the emblem of the Roman power.[2] This allegorical habit is the very essence not only of Dante's thought, but also of his style: he expresses nothing directly, everything by way of metaphor, simile, and allusion. In a word, in the *Divine Comedy* we seem to be listening to the muse of Latin Christianity, speaking to us with the compact philosophy of the schools, with the trained eloquence of Florentine statecraft, and with all the sweetness and refinement of the formed Italian language.

Langland's method is the exact reverse of all this. Allegory in him has nothing to do with philosophy, but is merely a poetical vehicle of moral thought. There is no poetical unity in his design beyond the person of the dreamer, and his machinery consists of a succession of separate and unconnected visions, each presenting a familiar scene of real life; such as a trial in the king's courts, a shriving of penitents, or a pilgrimage, from which the audience may easily infer the spiritual truth which it is intended to convey. While the *Divine Comedy* is crowded with images of actual persons and things, typifying some invisible form of existence, the *Vision of Piers Plowman* represents a drama in which all the actors are for the most part abstract qualities, though their deeds and words resemble those of persons in real life. It is easy to see that Langland derived his conception of allegory

[1] Even the Cardinal and Theological Virtues in the *Purgatorio* are represented as "nymphs" (canto xxi. 106) or "ladies" (canto xxix. 121). The only abstractions I can remember in the *Divine Comedy* are the Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, and Principalities of the *Paradiso*, canto xxviii.

[2] *Purgatorio*, xix. 1-24; *Paradiso*, xviii. 73-126.

mainly from the Miracle Plays, by means of which the clergy instructed the people at the high festivals of the Church, and which combined the moral and religious teaching of the homily with the exciting movement of the drama. He had studied the literary style of poems like the *Romance of the Rose*, Grosseteste's *Chastel d'Amour*, and De Guileville's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine;* but on the whole, the colloquial and dramatic forms he adopts show that the *Vision* was composed with a view rather to recitation in public than to private reading. Langland thus combined the old traditions both of Anglo-Saxon minstrelsy and Anglo-Saxon preaching, and this elemental method of conception furnishes the keynote to the style of the entire poem. When he has once set his characters on the stage, his sole thought is to make them convey sound moral instruction, often without the least regard for dramatic consistency. For example, in the description of the seven deadly sins, Envy, Pride, and Lechery are properly conducted to the confessional of Repentance, and justly describe themselves by showing their *effects* on the human heart. But Wrath says: "*I* was sometime *a frere*"; Avarice relates how he served an apprenticeship to "Symme atte stile"; while Gluttony, drinking at the alehouse with Wat the warrener, Cis the female cobbler, and Tim the tinker, has at last actually to be put to bed by his wife and daughter. So, too, Hunger is at first brought in as a moral agent, who helps Piers the Ploughman in his struggle with Wastour, by way of enforcing the Scripture moral, that if a man will not work neither shall he eat. This personage, however, is afterwards transformed into Famine, and is represented as a pest devouring all the substance of the countryside. The fable of the mice belling the cat is woven into the main action of the allegory, as if it were an incident actually occurring in the "field full of folk."

No attempt is made to preserve dignity or elevation in the speeches of the more venerable personages, the aim of the author being to bring home his truths to the audience by means of their own familiar idioms.

In this respect his work furnishes a striking contrast to that of Dante. When the latter saw the souls in the First Heaven of the Moon, he says he thought they were merely mirrored images, so like were they to the faint reflections seen in a shallow stream. Beatrice *smiled* at his mistake.

> Non ti maravigliar perch' io sorrida,
> Mi disse, appresso il tuo pueril coto,
> Poi sopra il vero ancor lo piè non fida,
> Ma te rivolve, come suole, a voto ;
> Vere sustanzie son ciò che tu vedi,
> Qui rilegate per manco di voto.[1]

Compare this with the address in Langland's *Vision* of Holy Church to the dreamer when he tells her that he has no natural knowledge of what Truth is :—

> "*Thou doted daffe*," quod she · "dulle are thi wittes.
> To litel latyn thou lernedst · lede in thi youthe.
> *Hei mihhi, quod sterilem duxi vitam juuenilem !*
> It is a kynde knowynge," quod she · "that kenneth in thi herte
> For to louye thi lorde · lever than thi-selue ;
> No dedly synne to do · dey though thou sholdest ;
> This I trow be treuthe · who can teche the better,
> Loke thow suffre hym to sey · and sithen lere it after."[2]

This is exactly the manner in which the Mystery Poet would have conveyed his instruction ; but it scarcely seems a style appropriate to Holy Church. On the other hand the realistic portraits of the seven deadly sins are equally admirable for the propriety of their symbolism and for their close observation of nature. The painting of Envy is unsurpassed in power :—

> Enuye with heuy herte · asked after schrifte,
> And carefullich *mea culpa* · he comsed to shewe.

[1] "Marvel not that I smile," said she to me, "at thy childish thought, since thou dost not yet trust thy foot upon the truth, but dost turn round, as the custom is, upon vacancy. True substances are these that thou seest, sent here for the neglect of a vow."—*Paradiso*, iii. 25.

[2] "Stupid dolt," quoth she, "dull are thy wits. Too little Latin didst thou learn in thy youth : 'Hei mihi quod sterilem duxi vitam juvenilem.' It is natural knowledge," quoth she, "that teacheth thee in thy heart to love thy lord better than thyself, to do no deadly sin, though thou shouldst die for it : this, I trow, is truth : if any can teach thee better, look that thou let him have his say, and afterwards teach it."

He was pale as a pelet · in the palsye he semed,
And clothed in a caury-maury · I couthe it noughte descryue ;
In kirtel and kourteby · and a knyf bi his syde.
Of a frere's frokke · were the forsleues,
And as a leke hadde yleye · longe in the sonne,
So loked he with lene chekes · lourynge foule.
His body was to-bolle for wratthe · that he bote his lippes,
And wryngynge he yede with the fiste · to wreke hym-selfe he thoughte
With workes or with wordes · whanne he seigh his tyme.
Eche a worde that he warpe · was of an adres tonge,
Of chydynge and of chalangynge · was his chief lyflode,
With bakbytinge and bismer · and beryng of fals witnesse.[1]

The figure of Avarice recalls one of the misers of Quentyn Matsys :—

And thanne cam Coueytise · can I hym nought descryue,
So hungriliche and holwe · Sire Heruey hym loked.
He was bitel-browed · and baber-lipped also
With two blered eyghen · as a blinde hagge ;
And as a letheren purs · lolled his chekes,
Wel sydder than his chyn · thei cheueled for elde ;
And as a bondman of his bacoun · his berd was bi-drauelled.
With an hode on his hed · a lousi hatte aboue,
And in a tauny tabarde · of twelue wynter age
Al to-torn and baudy · and ful of lys crepynge ;
But if that a lous couthe · han lopen the bettre
She sholde not haue walked on that welche · so was it thred-bare.[2]

[1] Envy with heavy heart prayed for absolution, and carefully commenced to show *mea culpa*. He was pale as a pellet (*i.e.* a stone ball used for slinging) : he seemed in a palsy, and was clothed in caury-maury (*i.e.* coarse material) such as I cannot describe, in an under-jacket, and short cloak with a knife by his side. The fore-sleeves were like those of a friar's gown, and like a leek that had lain long in the sun, so looked he with lean cheeks, louring foully. His body was swollen for wrath, so that he bit his lips, and went wringing with his fist : he thought to avenge himself with deeds or words, when he saw his time. Each word he uttered was like an adder's tongue ; his main livelihood was in chiding and challenging, with back-biting, and calumny, and bearing false witness.

[2] Then came Covetousness—I cannot describe him—so hungerly and hollow, he looked like Sir Hervey. He was beetle-browed and thick-lipped, with two bleared eyes, like a blind hag ; and his cheeks lolled like a leather purse, even below his chin : they shivered with old age ; and his beard was all bedrabbled, like a bondman's with his bacon ; with a hood on his head, and above it a lousy hat, and in a tawny coat twelve winters old, all tattered and dirty and full of lice creeping ; and if only a louse could have leapt better, she would not have walked on that cloth, so thread-bare was it.

It is in such passages as these that Langland produces his most striking effects. Yet his imagination is capable of rising far above this Flemish accuracy of detail into regions familiar to Dante and Milton. There are few more sublime passages in poetry than his description of the awful pause that prevailed in the operations of Nature during the three days' entombment of the Saviour. Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace, are represented discoursing together in the darkness on the scheme of Redemption, and wondering as to the light which is seen burning afar off about the gates of hell. Then, with a rapid transition, the poet carries us away to listen to the dialogue between the Powers of Darkness and the victorious Redeemer, who demands admission to the infernal dungeon. Satan, Lucifer, and their peers vainly resist His voice; but the gates of hell may not prevail against Him; and amid the triumphant chorus, "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in," Christ descends into hell, and brings forth the souls of the patriarchs and prophets.[1]

In another passage, referring incidentally to the Crucifixion, he employs imagery of remarkable picturesqueness:

> The sonne for sorwe thereof · les suyte for a tyme;
> Aboute mydday, whan most lighte is · and meal-tyme of seintes,
> Feddest with thi fresshe blode · owre forefadres in derknesse;
> *Populus qui ambulat in tenebris, vidit lucem magnam,*
> And throw the lighte that lepe out of the · Lucifer was blent
> And blewe alle the blessed into the blisse of paradise.[2]

Confused and bewildered in the maze of encyclopædic learning, seeking an impossible ideal in a social structure whose foundations had fallen into decay, the allegory of Langland, nevertheless, shows a depth of religious feeling

[1] Compare the parallel passage in the *Cursor Mundi* cited on p. 139, and also the analysis of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, pp. 44, 45.

[2] The sun for sorrow thereof lost sight for a time; about mid-day when there is most light, and at the meal-time of saints, thou didst feed with thy fresh blood our forefathers in darkness; and with the light that leaped out of thee Lucifer was blinded, and all thy blessed ones were wafted into the bliss of Paradise.

and a fund of political good sense which make it a mirror of the mind of the English people, and particularly of its Anglo-Saxon element, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. The strength of this popular instinct further manifests itself in the language and metre in which the thought of the poem is conveyed. Langland deliberately sought his vehicle of expression in the ancient Anglo-Saxon form of verse, and in doing so, though he may have perhaps adapted himself to an immediate demand of taste, he sacrificed the claim of his work to be ranked among the masterpieces of English poetry.

No fault, indeed, can be found with his language on the score of pedantry. Like Chaucer, he was always ready to make use of any word that served his purpose, and in spite of the Teutonic mould of his metre, he imports materials from France with as much freedom as his great contemporary. Addressing himself, as he evidently did, to the less educated part of the nation, he writes in a style which may be called colloquial, and which, from the mixture of dialects it contains, raises the presumption that the intercourse between the different parts of the country must have been frequent. But, in his versification, he conforms as strictly as he can to the alliterative forms which the natural development of the language tended to throw into disuse. So long as poetry was combined with minstrelsy these forms had served their purpose. Each verse contained three alliterative words, two of which were placed in the first half, and the third in the second, an arrangement which allowed for the just distribution of accent and emphasis. In the early stage of the Anglo-Saxon language, while the old inflected forms of words remained unimpaired, the art of the poet in this way readily co-operated with the art of the singer, the result being a succession of energetic phrases, defined by the cæsura of the verse, which must have enabled the harper to chant his narrative in a clear, if somewhat monotonous recitative. No one who examines the early specimens of Anglo-Saxon poetry can fail to be struck with the number of "Adonic" verses it contains. But as the inflections of nouns and verbs gradually

dropped off, and as their places were supplied by auxiliary words, the character of the language became more and more monosyllabic, and whatever it gained in logical precision it lost in compactness of harmony.

Langland religiously preserved the ancient framework of the alliterative verse, and though he is not always strict in his adherence to rule, the march of his rhythm is on the whole steady and regular. But a comparison of the opening of his *Vision* with the rhythmical movement in the *Battle of Brunanburh* will show the difficulties under which he laboured. The latter poem opens as follows :—

> Ädelstan cyning, eorla drehten,
> Beoma beáhgyfa, and his brodor eâc
> Eâdmund ädeling, ealdorlangne tyr
> Geslogon ät säcce sveorde ecgum
> Ymbe Brunanburh ; bordveall clufon,
> Heovon headolinde hamera lâfun,
> Eaforan Eádveardes, svâ him geädele vas
> From eneómægun, that hie at campe oft
> Vidh lathra gehväne land ealgodon
> Hord and hâmas.[1]

This is the beginning of the *Vision of Piers Plowman* :—

> In a somer seson · whan soft was the sonne,
> I shope me in shroudes · as I a shepe were,
> In habite as an heremite · unholy of workes,
> Went wyde in this worlde · wondres to here.
> Ac on a May mornynge · on Maluerne hulles
> Me bifell a ferly · of fairy me thoughte ;
> I was wery forwandred · and wente me to reste
> Under a brode banke · bi a bornes side,
> And as I lay and lened · and loked on the wateres,
> I slombered in a slepying · it sweyued so merye.

The sublime semi-lyrical chant of the first passage is well conveyed in alliterative verse. In Langland's narrative, on the contrary, which is at once didactic, satiric,

[1] *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Poesie*, Grein Text, 353 : King Athelstan, lord of earls, dispenser of rings to warriors, and also his brother, Edmund the Atheling, obtained lasting glory with the sword-edge in battle at Brunanburh. They clave the board-wall, hewed the war-lindens, with leavings of hammers, Edward's offspring, as was natural to them from their ancestry, that they often in battle, against every foe, should defend their lands, hoard and homes.

and colloquial, the movement of the verse, even where the imagery is beautiful, is disagreeably monotonous, and lends itself to cheap tricks of alliteration. Thus:—

> And whan it haued of this fold · flesshe and blode taken
> Was neuer lief upon lynde · lighter ther-after,
> And portatyf and persant · as the poynt of a nedle,
> That might non armure it lette · ne non heigh walles.[1]

Or—

> Drede is at the laste
> Lest Crist in consistorie · accorse ful manye.[2]

Or—

> Matthew with mannes face · mouthed thise wordes.[3]

The frequent occurrence of French words in Langland's *Vision* (examples of them may be seen above) seems to indicate that the poet exercised an arbitrary preference in rejecting the Norman metres, long naturalised in the country, for the more ancient Saxon form. In choosing this course he was indeed far from being singular, for, whatever was the cause, it is certain that, in the middle of the thirteenth century, there was a strong tendency among English poets to revive the traditional native style. Whether Langland was animated by patriotic motives, and desired, like Nævius, to oppose the victorious march of foreign culture, by showing the superiority of Saxon models, or whether he thought that the popular audience for whom he wrote would be more deeply touched by the ancient rhythms of their race, than by the meretricious attractions of French verse, in either case he ignored the conditions required to secure him the favour of posterity. As a people the Anglo-Saxons were now merged with their Norman conquerors in a single nation,

[1] And when it (the Truth) had taken flesh and blood of this world, no linden leaf was afterwards lighter, and quick and piercing as the point of a needle, so that no armour might hinder it and no high walls.

[2] There is dread lest at the last Christ in the judgment curse many.—The Consistory was an ecclesiastical court.

[3] Matthew with the man's face uttered these words.—Alluding to the symbolical representation of St. Matthew as a man; St. Mark being depicted as a lion; St. Luke as a bull; St. John as an eagle.

which had assimilated the qualities of each stock; as a separate language Anglo-Saxon had ceased to exist; and in resuscitating a form of metrical expression which time and the nature of things had rendered obsolete, Langland, with all his wit, imagination, and genius, abandoned to a greater inventor the honour of being recognised as the earliest classic poet of England.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHAUCER

If Langland may be regarded in some respects as the Nævius of English poetry, Chaucer is certainly its Ennius. From Spenser to Wordsworth the long line of our poets have recognised him as their founder, and with perfect justice, inasmuch as he was the first to impose on the early incivility of the English tongue the rules of harmony and proportion. In his hands the metrical sentence began to assume variety, balance, and modulation. He showed what sweet combinations of sound might be produced within the measured limits of the rhymed stanza; he was the first to make use of the heroic couplet. Ennius taught his countrymen how to refine their native genius by the use of Greek forms; Chaucer succeeded in expanding the vigorous but limited range of the Anglo-Saxon imagination, by bringing it into touch with the life and art of continental Europe. In the poetical models which he imported from France, and in the poetical themes suggested to him by Italy, he found a medium for reflecting the English conception of the manners and fashions of chivalry. But by his instinctive sympathy with that deeper and more enduring movement, afterwards known as the Renaissance, he may also be said to have invented a national mode of thought, which imparted a character of its own to the whole course of English poetry.

Almost everything known of the life of Geoffrey Chaucer is derived from official records, and has as much human interest as might be expected from such a source.

The son of John Chaucer, a citizen of London, he was born, probably in that city, between 1330 and 1340, and seems to have been received at an early age into the household of the Countess of Ulster, wife of Lionel of Clarence. He served in the expedition to France in 1359 which terminated in the Peace of Bretigny; and, having been taken prisoner in a skirmish, was ransomed in March 1360, after about two months' imprisonment. In 1367 his name appears as a member of the royal household, where he is described as being *dilectus valettus noster*, and as the recipient from the king of twenty marks a year, that is to say of about £140 according to present value. Two years later he is found again campaigning in France. He must have been by this time recognised as a man of abilities and accomplishments, for in the ten years following he was frequently employed on important diplomatic missions. In 1373 he paid his first visit to Italy, having been appointed one of the commissioners for negotiating with Genoa respecting the establishment of a factory for commerce on the English coast; and, if we are to take his own statement literally, he must at this period have made the acquaintance of Petrarch. For his services on that occasion he was liberally rewarded by the king. The next year he received from the king the grant of a pitcher of wine daily in the port of London, an allowance that was afterwards commuted for the yearly payment of twenty marks, besides which he was granted by the city authorities the lease of a house above the city gate of Aldgate on condition of his keeping it in good repair. He was also in this year made comptroller of the customs, and in 1375 he obtained from the king the wardship of the lands of Edmond Staplegate, a rich minor in the county of Kent, as well as the less valuable wardship of the heir of William de Soles in the same county.

All these bounties are signs of the high favour in which he was held, and further proof of confidence was given in 1377 when he was twice employed on diplomatic missions, first to Flanders, and afterwards to France, for the purpose of negotiating a peace. Soon after the

accession of Richard II. he was again sent to France to arrange a marriage between the king and a French princess, but the negotiations led to no result. Later in the year 1378 he went to Italy to treat with Barnabo Visconti and Sir John Hawkwood regarding the king's expedition of war. In 1385 he was allowed some relaxation in his official business by appointing a deputy to act as comptroller of the wool quay; and in 1386 he was elected as a knight of the shire for the county of Kent. Closely associated with the interests of John of Gaunt, he shared his patron's disfavour with the Parliament, being deprived in December of this year of all his appointments. In 1389, however, fortune again smiled upon him, and he was appointed clerk of the king's works in the Palace of Westminster and other places, an extremely lucrative post. He was so unfortunate in the next year as to be twice robbed in the same day of the king's money, first at Westminster and afterwards near Hatcham, in Surrey; but he was relieved of the obligation of making good the loss. From 1392 to 1398, when Richard II. was governing the country by himself, Chaucer seems to have been out of employment; and in the latter year he was apparently in distress, for he was sued for debt, and failed to appear (*non est inventus*); while soon afterwards the records show him humbly petitioning the king, in the name of charity, for a hogshead of wine, which was granted him. The accession of Henry Bolingbroke, son of his old patron, in 1399, put an end to his distresses; his pension was doubled; but as his name does not appear in the official records after 1400, it may be assumed that death did not allow him to enjoy the fruits of recovered prosperity for more than a year.

Chaucer was married. His wife's Christian name was Philippa, and though her surname is not known, it would appear to be not improbable that she was a lady in the household of the Countess of Ulster, who is entered in the accounts as "Philippa Pan," *i.e. Panetaria*, or superintendent of the pantry. She received in 1372 a pension from John of Gaunt for services rendered to his second

wife Constance of Castile, and she apparently died in the year 1387. From the reflections on the married state made in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and elsewhere in his works, it has been inferred that Chaucer's domestic life was not a happy one. The inference is not absolutely necessary, for satires upon marriage had become one of the commonplaces of poetry since the example set in the *Romance of the Rose;* but some colour is given to it by a passage in the *House of Fame*, which it seems difficult to interpret in any other sense than as a personal allusion.[1]

Though these details furnish no key to the personal character and genius of Chaucer, they illustrate what is perhaps the most essential feature in his work. Before him all the chief poets who had used the Anglo-Saxon or the early English language, Cædmon, Cynewulf, Layamon, the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, Robert of Brunne, Langland himself, had been clergymen, and had therefore composed their poems in a clerical spirit. Chaucer was a layman, and though his mind had evidently been trained in the encyclopædic course prescribed by the Church, his ideas were enlarged and corrected by the education of political experience. He served the king in the court, in the battle-field, and in diplomatic and civil employments, and in these capacities he acquired that varied knowledge of the world, the full fruits of which are seen in the noble design of the *Canterbury Tales.* His learning was as wide as his social experience. Not only was he versed in the French poetry, fashionable at the French and English courts, but he had read the masterpieces of Italian prose and poetry, and besides having studied many of the theological and philosophical works of the mediæval doctors of the Church, he was an ardent admirer of Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Statius, and Boethius. His knowledge of astronomy, as it was then understood, was exact, and he had evidently pushed his inquiries some distance into alchemy. His in fact was

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's tongue, sword, eye,

[1] See hereafter, p. 275.

and no man could have been better equipped, socially and intellectually, for the foundation of a new literature. But before considering him as a poet, it is of importance to determine the list of his works that may be regarded as undoubtedly genuine.

Upon this point we have in the first place his own testimony. In his *Legend of Good Women* he makes Alcestis plead on his behalf, as follows:

> He made the boke that hight the House of Fame,
> And eke the Deth of Blanche the Duchesse,
> And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse,
> And al the love of Palamon and Arcite
> Of Thebes, thogh the storye is knowen lyte;
> And manye an ympne for your holy dayes,
> That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes;
> And for to speke of other halynesse,
> He hath in prose translated Boece,
> And made the Lyfe also of Saynte Cecile.
> He made also, goone ys a grete while,
> Origenes upon the Maudeleyne.

In the Prologue to the "Man of Lawe's Tale" he further says, that in his youth he wrote the story of *Ceis and Alcyone*, an obvious allusion to the tale on this subject inserted in the *Book of the Duchess*. Besides the poems enumerated in the passage just cited, the God of Love, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, accuses him of having translated the *Romaunt of the Rose* and *Troilus and Cressida*. As the *Legend* was clearly written before the publication of the *Canterbury Tales*, the list of the poet's authentic works that it contains cannot be regarded as exhaustive. But from himself we learn nothing more, nor is any further information afforded by the catalogue of his writings furnished in the *Fall of Princes* by Lydgate, who merely repeats in other words the substance of what is said in the Prologue to the *Legend*. John Shirley, however, an enthusiastic admirer of Chaucer, who died in 1456, aged ninety, leaving a MS. copy of the poet's works, includes in it, besides the poems avowed by Chaucer, the *A. B. C.*, the *Complaynt unto Pite*, *A Complaynt to His Lady*, *Queen Anelida and False Arcite*, the

*Complaynts of Mars and Venus*, *Chaucer to his Emptie Purse*, *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, *Chaucer's Woordes unto his own Scrivener*, and *Lak of Stedfastnesse*. From MSS. of good authority in the fifteenth century and from other quarters the following additions may safely be made to the above list: *L'Envoy to Bukton*, *Merciles Beaute*, *The Former Age*, *L'Envoy to Scogan*, *To Rosemounde*, *Balade against Women Unconstaunt*, *Proverbs*, and *An Amorous Complaint*.

The first edition of Chaucer's collected poems was published in 1532 by W. Thynne, and has served as the groundwork of all subsequent editions. All the poems contained in it are unquestionably genuine; but some poems, which are certainly Chaucer's, are omitted. This edition was reprinted by John Stowe in 1561, with large additions, and among them the translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and the *Court of Love*. As to the former of these poems, Chaucer himself says that he translated it in his youth; but there is no external evidence to show that the translation included by Stowe in his works was made by him, while the omission of the piece from Shirley's MS. and from Thynne's edition raises a presumption against its authenticity. It is now, however, held by the highest authorities that the first 1705 lines in the translation are probably Chaucer's, while the remainder, written as it is in the Northern dialect, proceeds from another hand. The *Court of Love*, in which the final *e* is almost entirely suppressed for metrical purposes, can hardly have been composed earlier than the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thynne's edition, thus augmented by Stowe, was reproduced by Thomas Speght in 1598 and 1602 with still further enlargements, the chief of which were *Chaucer's Dream* and *The Flower and the Leaf*. From internal evidence it appears that neither of these poems ought to be included in the list of Chaucer's authentic works.[1]

[1] The foregoing particulars respecting the Life and Works of Chaucer are mainly derived from the great edition of the poet by Professor Skeat, a work of inestimable value to all students of English Literature. Such references to

Looking to the compositions which may be confidently accepted as his own, it is plain that, in determining Chaucer's place in English poetry, he must be regarded first as a translator, next as an imitator, and then as an inventor; while, in the first capacity, we must observe the improvements he effected in the art, not only by refining the harmony of the language, but also by expanding and elevating the range of imagination.

1. The first tribute paid to Chaucer's genius is a poetical address sent to him by Eustace Deschamps, an eminent French contemporary poet, who speaks of him as "Grant *Translateur*, noble Geoffroi Chaucier."[1] This title he had acquired by his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, made, as he tells us, in his youth, and by his translation in prose of the *De Consolatione* of Boethius, which he probably finished about 1380. The poem generally known as *Chaucer's ABC*, which he is said to have written as an aid to the devotions of the Duchess Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, was an English rendering of a French original, composed by Guillaume de Guileville, and forming part of that poet's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine;* and it may be reasonably supposed that among his "ballads, rondels, virelayes," few of which have come down to us, many were translations, or at any rate imitations, of poems composed on the other side of the Channel.

By importing this large French strain into the language Chaucer may be said to have decided the prolonged struggle which had been maintained since the Norman Conquest as to the subject matter and form of his art. For nearly two centuries, as we have already seen, Saxon and Norman traditions had striven for the mastery in English verse. The *Brut* of Layamon shows us that, so far back as the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Saxon minstrel was trying to adapt the themes of the Norman Geoffrey

Tyrwhitt's edition as occur in the notes to this History were made before the publication of Professor Skeat's edition.

[1] *Œuvres Complètes*, publiées par le Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire (1878), vol. ii. p. 138.

of Monmouth to the old alliterative measure of his race. After the middle of the same century Robert of Gloucester attempted to imitate the Alexandrine metre; while the *Hule and Nightingale*, together with the various poems of Richard Hampole, Robert Mannyng, and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, illustrate the influence of the octosyllabic verse of four accents, used by Marie of France. The majority of these poets (Robert of Gloucester and the author of the *Hule and Nightingale* are exceptions) write in the Northern dialect, and furnish a proof that the superior refinement of French verse was felt in those parts of the island most remote from continental influence. A variation of the octosyllabic measure, the *rime couée*, was occasionally used as a vehicle for the innumerable romances which still gratified the popular taste. On the other hand a vigorous attempt had been made, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the north and the west, to preserve the alliterative form as a measure suitable to these favourite tales of chivalry. One of the alliterative romances, *The Green Knight*, seems to have been popular; and, as we have seen, Langland adopted the measure as the vehicle for his *Vision*. On the whole, however, alliteration steadily gave way before the attractions of rhyme, though some poets, like Minot, endeavoured, not without skill, to combine the advantages of the two systems in such stanzas as the following:—

Haly Gaste, thou gif him grace
  That he in gude time may begin,
And send to him both might and space
  His heritage well for to win;
  And sone assoyle him of his sin,
Hende God, that heried hell
  For France now es he entered in,
And there he dights him for to dwell.[1]

It is worthy of observation that the Northern poets, in proportion as they rely on the effects of alliteration in rhyming verse, pay little heed to regularity in the distri-

[1] Minot's *Poems* (Hall), p. 22.

bution of the accent, or in the number of the syllables. The following is a characteristic type of Minot's stanza :—

A lethern ladder · and a lang line,
A small bote was tharby · that put them fro pyne ;
The folk that thai fand thaire · was faine for to fyne ;
Sone thaire diner was dight · and there wold thai dine ;
There was thaire purpose · to dine and to dwell,
For treson of the Franche men · that fals were and fell.[1]

It is easy to see that the loss of inflections, in the Northern dialect, favoured the triple movement which, as has been already remarked, is a pronounced feature in the old Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse.

Chaucer was no stranger to the art of his Northern predecessors. The speeches in one of his *Canterbury Tales* are given in the Northern dialect, and he had doubtless read all the rude masterpieces which had hitherto been produced in the English tongue. But in none of them did he find, either in respect of metre or rhythm, an instrument adequate for his aims. In the Prologue to the "Parson's Tale" he alludes somewhat contemptuously to alliterative verse,[2] while the lawless treatment of rhyming verse, by poets who had almost got rid of inflections, was displeasing to a fastidious ear which required the accent to be regularly distributed in lines measured by an equal number of syllables. Chaucer resolved, accordingly, to look exclusively to France for his metrical models. Not only did he conform the movement of the verse of four accents, much more strictly than had been hitherto the practice, to the French octosyllabic measure, but he introduced from France rhyming stanzas of various types, together with the rhyming couplet of five accents,[3] and composed "ballads, roundels, and virelayes," on the principles approved by the Provençals.

In order to carry out these metrical improvements,

[1] Minot's *Poems*, p. 35.

[2] But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
I can nat geste—rum, ram, ruf—by lettre,
Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettre.

[3] He took this metre from Machault (Skeat, iii. p. 383), using it for the first time in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

Chaucer was almost necessarily forced to confine himself to the use of the iambic movement characteristic of French verse, and in this task he was greatly aided by the old Anglo-Saxon grammatical forms still preserved in the literature of the Southern dialect. The different vowel endings, formerly used to distinguish the declensions of nouns, had been swallowed up by the omnivorous *e*, which also remained to indicate the infinitive of verbs, the definite adjective, and the adverb. A striking, though an accidental, likeness accordingly existed between many English and French words, since in the latter language also the letter *e* survived as the representative of ancient forms of inflection in the parent Latin. In both tongues this vowel was so rapidly becoming mute, that an interesting question arises whether or not it was pronounced at the end and in the *cæsura* of an English verse, in words where it had a grammatical significance.

No positive answer can be returned to this question, for we cannot now be sure which was the stronger force, surviving grammatical usage, or the vocal tendency to the contraction of words. We know indeed that Chaucer wrote with strict regard to system both grammatical and metrical, and that he made correct use of the final *e* in versification whenever it suited his purpose to do so. On the other hand, the strong natural drift of pronunciation must have powerfully influenced him through his ear. The fact that the Northern dialect had lost almost all traces of inflection; the prevalence in French verse of masculine rhymes; the natural tendency in our own verse to discard double rhymes; all this, added to the uncertainty in the accentuation of words, observable in the writers of the period, exempts us at any rate from the necessity of believing that Chaucer's verse was disfigured by anything so displeasing to our modern sense of harmony as a series of feminine rhymes.[1]

[1] The question is ably discussed by Mr. Joseph Payne in *Essays on Chaucer* (Publications of Chaucer Society), iv. pp. 84-154. Strong arguments are forthcoming on both sides of the question; each reader may therefore follow the lead of his own taste.

In any case the models which Chaucer studied in his youth, and the success which attended his first effort to reduce his ideas to practice in his translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, furnished the English language with a new standard of versification which no poet could henceforth afford to disregard. A comparison of the following passage from this translation with any of the extracts previously made from the writings of Robert of Brunne or the *Cursor Mundi*, will show what a vast improvement had been effected by the genius of the new poet in the metrical vehicle of expression. Chaucer is describing the allegorical figure of Eld :—

The tyme that may not sojourne,
But goth, and never may retourne,
As water that doun renneth ay
But never drope retourne may ;
There may no-thing as tyme endure,
Metal, nor erthely creäture ;
For alle thing it fret and shal ;
The tyme eek that chaungeth al,
And al doth wax and fostred be,
And alle thing destroyeth he :
The tyme that eldeth our ancestours,
And eldeth kinges and emperours,
And that us alle shall overcomen
Er that deeth us shal have nomen :
The tyme, that hath al in welde,
To elden folk, had maad her elde
So inly, that to my witing
She mighte helpe her-self no-thing,
But turned agen unto childhede ;
She had no-thing hir-self to lede,
Ne wit ne pith inwith hir holde,
More than a child of two yeer olde.
But natheles I trowe that she
Was fair sum-tyme, and fresh to see,
Whan she was in hir rightful age :
But she was past al that passage,
And was a doted thing bicomen.
A furred cope on had she nomen ;
Wel had she clad hir-self and warm,
For colde might els doon hir harm.
These olde folkes have alway colde ;
Hir kind is swiche whan they ben olde.

Chaucer's translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose* is not remarkable only as making a landmark in the refinement of our versification. It marks with equal significance the rise of a new spirit in English poetry, the importation of thoughts and themes from the Continent, announcing the approach of the Renaissance. Hitherto the subjects of English verse composition had been chosen almost exclusively for the gratification of two classes of readers, concentrated in the monastery and the castle. Since the days of Dunstan monasticism, as we have seen, had laid a heavy hand on the Saxon imagination, and the homilies of Ælfric, the devotional treatise in verse of Richard Hampole, the tales of Robert Mannyng and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, even the allegory of Langland, prove how powerfully this ideal of life had affected the spirit of the people. Almost the sole opposing note is heard in the curious poem, *The Hule and the Nightingale;* but the rising opposition of the laity to the dominant mode of ecclesiastical thought takes form and body in the poetry of Chaucer, whose genius is almost as hostile to the monastic element, as that of Boccaccio or John de Meung. In his Canterbury Pilgrimage, he has revealed to us, after his own dramatic manner, the dislike with which he and a large number of his countrymen regarded the educational discipline of the cloister. The Monk is there made, with admirable propriety, to entertain the pilgrims with moral tales of the kind which were commonly told at the convent refectory. After the company have listened with singular patience to a considerable number of these edifying stories, the narrator is at last somewhat abruptly stopped by the Knight, who confesses to his own weariness, and who is eagerly supported by the Host, Harry Bailly, in the following characteristic criticism :—

> Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
> Youre tale anoyeth all this compaignye;
> Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
> For thereinne is ther no desport ne game.
> Wherefor, sire Monk, daun Piers by youre name,

I pray yow hertely telle us somewhat elles,
For sikerly nere clinking of youre belles,[1]
That on youre bridal hang on every syde,
By hevene Kyng, that for us alle dyde!
I sholde er this han fallen doun for slepe,
Althogh the slough had never been so deepe;
Thanne had youre tale al be toold in veyn,
For certeinly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
Whereas a man may have noon audience,
Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence;
And wel I wot the substance is in me,
If any thing shal wel reported be.
Sir, sey somewhat of huntyng, I yow preye.

Chaucer lets us see very plainly that the discredit into which the monkish orders had fallen had reacted on the entire system of encyclopædic culture, and that a large part of society, mainly consisting of the land-owning and trading classes, were beginning to form conceptions of life and art distinct from the ideas presented to them in the monastic models of the Church.

An equally dramatic proof of the change in taste among the same influential classes, as regards romance, is furnished by the criticism on the tale of "Sir Thopas." Stories of this kind had been listened to with pleasure by the rude ancestors of the pilgrims when sung to them by the minstrels at meal-times, and still found favour with the people at large, who would collect on village greens, in the high roads, and at the approaches to bridges, while the wandering singer chanted in endless rhymes the feats of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton. But in the fastidious host of the Tabard such conventional art moved no other feeling than disgust:

"Na moore of this, for Goddes dignitee!"
Quod oure Hoste, "for thou makest me
So wery of thy verray lewednesse
That, also wisly God my soule blesse,
Min eres aken of thy drasty speche.
Now swich a rym the devel I beteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel," quod he.
. . . . . .

[1] For surely if it were not for the clinking of your bells.

> "Thou doost noght elles but despendest tyme;
> Sire, at o word, thou shalt no lenger ryme.
> Lat se wher thou kanst tellen aught in geeste,
> Or telle in prose somewhat, at the leeste,
> In which ther be som murthe, or som doctryne."

Here we see the germs of literary criticism. It is plain that the days of oral minstrelsy are numbered. The rude recitals of the adventures of Paladins and knights-errant, the successors of the ancient tribal chiefs, are already becoming unpalatable to men who have tasted the refinements and luxuries of civil life. A conception of nature and human society, larger than those with which their insular traditions had hitherto made them familiar, began to form itself in the minds of Englishmen. Ideas of philosophy, rhetoric, satire, made their way to them from the Continent. They saw with admiration the successful attempts of the poets of France and Italy to express their thoughts with precision in their native language, and they were ambitious of tuning their own speech by the same literary standards. Translation was the channel by which it was necessary to unite English with continental thought; Chaucer's was the genius which effected the junction by an English rendering of a poem so widely popular as the *Roman de la Rose*. Of the influence exercised on his imagination by this poem constant traces may be found in almost every one of his later compositions. The *Romance of the Rose*, moreover, inspired him to study and translate Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, a book which not only equipped him with a large part of his philosophy of life, but also contributed in no slight degree to his poetical development. The final fruits of this long and patient commerce with other men's minds reveal themselves in that later stage of translation represented in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

To call this work a "translation," in the strictly literal sense of the word, would be a mistake.[1] The

[1] The curious reader should consult Mr. W. M. Rossetti's very careful collation of the texts of the *Filostrato* and *Troilus and Criseyde* (Publications of the Chaucer Society, 1873).

poem contains 8246 lines, and of these 2583 are translated from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, but the rest are Chaucer's own. Moreover the whole conception and treatment of the subject by Chaucer are in marked contrast to the method of Boccaccio; and these facts may throw light on certain features in *Troilus and Criseyde* which have greatly perplexed the commentators.

For it is undoubtedly remarkable that, while Chaucer owes so much to the Italian poet, he nowhere acknowledges his debt to him, but on the contrary leads the reader to believe that he is following an old Latin author named Lollius. This is a deliberate mystification, for he ascribes to Lollius a sonnet which he has translated directly from Petrarch.[1] Chaucer's reason for the selection of the name Lollius is not certainly known, but it has been suggested, with equal ingenuity and probability, that he was misled, by a confused recollection of a line of Horace, to suppose Lollius to have been a historian of the Trojan war.[2] As to his reason for the suppression of Boccaccio's name, however, I entertain very little doubt, and believe it to have been essentially connected with his design in writing *Troilus and Criseyde.*

It would appear that the poem was composed between the years 1379 and 1383, that is to say, after Chaucer's second visit to Italy, when he was doubtless master of the Italian language. The course of the narrative, as I have said, follows for the most part the well-known lines marked out by Boccaccio. Nevertheless *Troilus and Criseyde* hinges on an idea quite different from that of the *Filostrato.*[3] We know from the author of the latter work

[1] *Troilus and Criseyde*, bk. i. 394. Compare Petrarch, Sonnet 88. In *Queen Annelida and False Arcite* he pretends to be following a Latin poet, Corinne; yet he is translating from the *Teseide.*

[2] "Trojani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli."—Horace, *Epist.* i. 2. 1. This happy suggestion was made by Dr. G. Latham in the *Athenæum*, 3rd October 1868.

[3] "Nelle quali se avviene che leggiate quante volte Troilo piangere e dolerse della partita di Griseida troverete, tante apertamente potrete comprendere e conoscere le mie medesime voci, le lagrime, i sospiri e l' angosce; e quante volte le bellezze, i costumi e qualunque altra cosa laudevole in donna. di Griseida scritto troverete, di voi essere parlato potrete intendere."—Boccaccio's Preface to his *Filostrato.*

that the theme was chosen as a means of expressing his own feelings during his absence from his mistress. Its main motive is therefore of a lyrical nature, and indeed throughout it Troilus appears as the prominent character; the charms of Cressida are insisted on mainly to heighten the idea of her lover's sufferings at parting from her; and her treachery to him is related almost without comment, as if it were something quite in the ordinary course of nature. Chaucer, on the other hand—and in this he gave perhaps the first proof of his own strong native bent—was struck with the dramatic points of the story; and, with his mind still full of the *Romance of the Rose*, he designed, in the first place, to give a poetical representation of woman's fickleness in love. For this purpose he heightened the character of Troilus, making him much more manly and heroic than he appears in the *Filostrato;* he divided the interest of the story between the hero and the heroine, dwelling in detail on the gradations of feeling through which Cressida passed; and he brought into such prominence the character of Pandarus, that Shakespeare had afterwards merely to fill in the dramatic outline Chaucer had sketched. Not finding in Boccaccio's treatment of the story all the materials he needed, Chaucer turned to other sources, and borrowed numerous incidents and touches of a highly dramatic kind from the *Historia Trojana* of Guido delle Colonne. Finally, in order to give the moral atmosphere to the tale, which both his conception and the ideas of his time required, he had recourse to Boethius, and transferred many of that author's reflections into his poem to emphasise the different stages of the action.

Something, however, still remained to be done. Chaucer had produced by judicious combinations an admirably artistic story; but, according to all contemporary rules of art, it was necessary for him to show that his moral example was founded on good historical *authority;* and this was the more needful under the circumstances, because the character of Cressida was

contrary to the chivalrous conception of the immaculate virtue of women. The name of Boccaccio, even if it had not provoked the censure of the Church, would have carried no historical weight; the history of Guido delle Colonne lacked antiquity; while the narrative of Dares the Phrygian, in which Benoît de Sainte More and Guido laid their foundations, could not be cited for any particulars about the loves of Troilus and Cressida. Chaucer had therefore to create for his imaginary history an equally imaginary historian, and this he did by citing the "Latin" of the supposed Trojan historian Lollius.[1]

The poetical structure which Chaucer built on these foundations is a fine example of the character of his genius, at once flexible and inventive. *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals the influence on his mind of all the great intellectual forces of the period: Catholicism, Feudalism, Democracy, and the Renaissance. The interest of the poem is concentrated in the development of the character of Cressida. In the first three books Cressida's conduct is regulated in strict conformity with the standing rules of chivalrous society. She resists her own inclinations, and withstands the solicitations of Pandarus on behalf of Troilus, with all the oppositions of argument required by the science of the troubadours and the regulations of the Courts of Love. André le Chapelain himself could have found no fault with her behaviour. When she finally surrenders to Troilus, she has as yet been guilty of no offence according to the moral code of the time, which merely required her to be true and steadfast in her attachment to one preferred lover. Of all this refined casuistry and analysis there is no trace whatever in the Cressida of Boccaccio, who represents his heroine simply as a young widow in love. At the same time, while preserving the chivalrous standard, Chaucer, with extraordinary skill, by associating Cressida

[1] For-why to every lovere I me excuse
That of no sentement I this endyte,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it wryte.
*T. and C.* bk. ii. 14.

with the semi-comic character of Pandarus, who plays the same part in his story as afterwards in Shakespeare's play, removed the heroine's character from the metaphysical region of chivalrous love, and reduced it to a human and almost a *bourgeois* level. It is not till the fourth book that the deterioration of Cressida's nature reveals itself incidentally, in the facility with which she listens, without displeasure though without response, to the artful love-making of Diomede. Even then she is not at once entirely false to the requirements of chivalrous love. When Diomede visits her in her tent, and speaks to her of love, Boccaccio makes her refuse him in such a way as to encourage him to speak further; but in Chaucer, even while she encourages her new lover, she shows that she has still a sense of what is due to her sex:

> And that doth me to han so grete a wonder
> *That ye wol scornen any womman so;*
> Ek, God woot, love and I ben fer asonder,
> I am disposed bet, so mot I go
> Unto my deth, to pleyne and maken wo;
> *What I shal efter done I kan not seye,*
> *But trewelich as yet me list not pleye.*

It was doubtless this remarkable dramatic skill, joined to a half-compassionate vein of theological reflection in excuse of Cressida, which afterwards brought Chaucer into difficulties with his female critics, and forced him to the recantation and penance we shall find recorded in the Prologue to his *Legend of Good Women.*

In the meantime we may observe, from his treatment of the story, how much his many-sided genius owed to his labours of translation. From the portion of the *Roman de la Rose* which was the production of Guillaume de Lorris he took that element in his poem which reflects the spirit of the Courts of Love; the work of John de Meung, full of the spirit of democratic revolt and iconoclasm, inspired the conception of Pandarus; Boccaccio, on the other hand, imbued with the rising genius of the Renaissance, showed him how to animate with human interest and modern feeling the stories of the ancient world.

When we turn from these translations to his original work, we can trace, step by step, his painful ascent from humble efforts of imitation, up to that final monument of invention, the *Canterbury Tales*, which justly entitles him to a place among the great poets of the world.

2. On the threshold of his poetical work stand a group of compositions which bear a certain family likeness to each other in matter, and also exhibit a common method of treatment. These are the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parlement of Foules*, the *House of Fame*, and the *Legend of Good Women*. All of them are connected, in a greater or less degree, with that idea of love which is handled in the first part of the *Romance of the Rose*, and in all of them the allegorical form of composition is employed. Moreover, in three of them at least, Chaucer has formed his design in the same manner; that is to say, he has borrowed his leading ideas from other authors, but has made them his own, by placing them in a context which redeems them from the reproach of being mere plagiarisms. His inventions are not always very felicitous, but still, as far as they go, they are original.

The *Book of the Duchess* is an elegy on Blanche, first wife of John of Gaunt, who died in 1369. Chaucer was at the time a member of the king's household, and therefore, doubtless, in constant communication with the duke, whose influence predominated in the closing years of Edward III.'s reign. The poet's manly genius was little qualified for the hypocrisies of courtly verse, but his position perhaps made the tribute of some poetical compliment indispensable. Meditating on the form in which he should convey his sympathy, he found a suggestion in a composition of Guillaume de Machault, the most fashionable French poet of the fourteenth century, whose verses must of course have been familiar to court circles in England. Machault was the lineal poetical descendant of Guillaume de Lorris, and in many dreams, visions, and allegories, had reproduced, with an added insipidity, the meaningless metaphysic and faded elegance of his ancestor. Among them was a poem called *Le Dit*

*de la Fontaine Amoureuse*, of which his latest editor, P. Tarbé, gives the following account:—

"The poet on waking hears a dolorous voice singing the pains of love; he seizes his pen, and hastens to write down the tender complaint recited by it. This includes among other things the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. At the end of it Machault goes to look for the author, and the latter informs him that he has merely worked by order of his lord, whose homage is proudly repulsed by a lady. Both go to look for this noble and unfortunate lover. He was a nobleman handsome and agreeable, and like a king's son; he conducts Machault into a pleasant thicket, where is a magnificent crystal fountain with bas-reliefs representing the story of Narcissus, and Helen being carried off by Paris. They sit down, and Machault receives the confidences of his new friend. They go to sleep, doubtless so as to allow Venus to appear to them in a dream, who, after having told them the story of the judgment of Paris, promises her protection to the young lord, and calls up before his eyes a graceful shadow, which is that of his mistress, who smiles upon him, holds sweet converse with him, and leaves him full of hope."[1]

That Chaucer had read this poem (which was so popular that the poet tells us he had to divide his MS. to satisfy the impatience of his readers) is plain; that he derived from it the suggestion of the *Book of the Duchess* is I think scarcely less doubtful, although he only used it after the manner of an original inventor for the framing of his own plot, which is as follows:—In the opening lines he announces that he is a bad sleeper, and he goes on to say that on one occasion, to beguile his sleepless hours, he read the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, wherein the mention of Morpheus had such an effect upon him that he fell asleep. While sleeping he dreamed that he was lying in a chamber painted in illustration of

[1] Œuvres de Machault, pp. xx., xxi. This edition contains a notice of Machault's life. The relations of the poet with Agnes of Navarre furnish a most curious and interesting illustration of the manners of the time. See pp. xiv.-xx.

the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and that he heard the noise of horses and hounds. Going out to see what it was, he found that the Emperor Octavian was hunting; and while he was watching the chase, a "whelp" came up to him and enticed him into a forest, where he found a goodly knight sitting on the ground and uttering a doleful song, in which he complained that his lady was dead. The knight becoming aware of Chaucer's presence, the latter makes an apology for his intrusion, which the other courteously accepts, and after a very long description of the extent of his sorrow, goes on to unfold the cause of it in extremely enigmatical terms. Fortune, he says, has played at chess with him, and has taken his best piece. Chaucer, understanding him literally, observes, not unreasonably, that this is scarcely a sufficient ground for meditating suicide, as the knight seems to do, after the example of a number of persons in ancient history whom he enumerates. The other thereupon explains, by telling a long story about his love and the innumerable perfections of his lady. When he has done, Chaucer, whose tact in the adventure does not shine, asks where the lady is, and the knight, no doubt seeing that allegory is little suited to the comprehension of his hearer, tells him plainly, "She is dedde." Then the poet awakes and finds it is a dream.

A distinguished English scholar has been moved to undertake Chaucer's defence against the strictures passed on this poem by a French critic; he finds it graceful and pathetic.[1] I confess that it seems to me few readers, who judge the composition apart from Chaucer's prestige, are likely to share his opinion. The design, as described above, is singularly barren of genuine invention. Simple as it is, the action is clumsily conducted, for the knight acquaints the reader from the first with his lady's death, thus spoiling what might have been a dramatic climax, if the fact had been withheld till after the recital of all her amiable qualities. Nor is the crudeness of the general conception relieved by any remarkable beauties of detail.

[1] See Professor A. W. Ward, *Chaucer* (Men of Letters Series), p. 72.

The story serves to piece together a certain number of "purple patches," taken from various poems which the author has read and admired; but these do not seem to be in any way necessarily connected with the central thought. It would, in fact, be as exacting to look for pathos in a poem of this order, as in Spenser's *Astrophel*, or in the pastoral elegies described in the 30th number of the *Guardian*. The mourning is of that conventional kind which is prescribed for a conventional class of poetry, and, owing to a certain lack of skill, the composition fails to attain a high place even in that lowly sphere.

But though the *Book of the Duchess* cannot be esteemed highly as a work of poetical art, it is of singular interest as marking a stage in Chaucer's own poetical progress. It shows us that his earliest method of composition was to elaborate a central idea on the lines suggested to him by a contemporary poet, and to support and embellish this with subsidiary ideas derived from other literary sources. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone is translated from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, xi. 472-572, but it contains touches borrowed from the *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse*. The latter poem also furnishes him with the description of the knight's lost lady (vv. 805-830). From another poem of Machault's, *Remède de la Fortune*, he takes the picture of Fortune (vv. 634 *et seq.*); while the idea of the game of chess played with that goddess comes from the *Roman de la Rose* (v. 618 etc., compare *R. R.* v. 6644). These are but a few instances of the manner in which Chaucer in this poem has availed himself of other men's labours for the decoration of his own design.[1]

The same method is adopted in the *Parlement of Foules*, a complimentary poem composed for a more joyful occasion, viz. the betrothal of Richard II. of England to Anne of Bohemia in 1381. Here again the source of inspiration may plainly be traced to a French original. For the foundation of Chaucer's poem is indicated by its name, and the incident to which this

[1] For other examples see Professor Skeat's notes to the *Book of the Duchess* in his edition of the Minor Poems, pp. 234-272.

points is found in the fabliau, *Hueline et Eglantine*, which records how two ladies disputed which of them had the more courteous lover, one being loved by a knight, the other by a clerk. They agree to refer the decision to the Court of Love, and the following account of their proceedings is given by Legrand d'Aussy in his abstract of the *fabliau* :—

"The god is reclining on a bed of roses, in a room of which the walls are hung with bows and arrows. On the arrival of the ladies he rises and salutes them, and, taking them by the hand, seats them at his side. Having been informed of the object of their visit, he assembles the barons of his court, which is, singularly enough, composed only of birds : and he proposes to them the great question of the two lovers. The falcon, the sparrow-hawk, the jay, the magpie, and to use La Fontaine's phrase *tous les gens querelleurs*, even the cuckoo of evil omen, declare themselves loudly for the knights, and maintain that they are the most courteous. The wren, the pigeon, the lark with his fine crest, and the goldfinch with his scarlet plumage, take the part of the clerks."[1]

The question is finally decided by a combat between the nightingale, as champion for the clerks, and the parrot, who represents the knights, and in this the latter is decisively vanquished.

But while he thus borrowed a central idea, Chaucer had still to get it into shape for his particular purpose. His first step was to frame it in the orthodox dream-setting. For this he betook himself to the head-source of all such compositions, namely the *Somnium Scipionis*, and feigned that during the day he had been reading the work of Macrobius, of which he gives an abstract. As in the *Book of the Duchess* reading about Morpheus had caused him to fall asleep, so now, through reading about Africanus, the image of that hero appeared to him in a dream, and brought him to a gate in a park wall, over which he saw two inscriptions, suggested to him by his recollection of Dante's *Inferno*. Africanus takes him

[1] Legrand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux*, i. 311-12.

into the park, just as Virgil guides Dante into hell; and, once within the gates, he gives a list of all the trees he beholds, in imitation of Boccaccio (*Teseide*, xi. st. 22-24), and Guillaume de Lorris (*Roman de la Rose*, 1361), who had themselves imitated Statius (*Thebais*, vi. 98). He then proceeds to describe a garden he saw; the description, however, is not taken from the French poem that suggested his original idea, but from Boccaccio's *Teseide* (canto vii. st. 51-60; 63-66; 61-62). In this delightful spot he finds the Goddess Nature, surrounded by birds who have come to choose their mates, for it is St. Valentine's Day, and the imagery of all this portion of the poem is largely derived from the *De Planctu Naturæ* of Alanus de Insulis, though the idea of the council of birds is taken from *Hueline et Eglantine*. The rest of the action is Chaucer's own invention. Nature carries on her wrist a "formell egle," who is wooed before the assembled birds by three "tercell egles"; the parliament of fowls discuss the case, and, after listening to their various proposals, the formell eagle announces that she will make known her choice at the end of a year. The allegory signifies that the Princess of Bohemia received offers of marriage from the Prince of Bavaria and the Margrave of Meissen, as well as from Richard, and that the negotiations for her betrothal to the latter lasted for twelve months.[1]

The *Parlement of Foules* shows a great advance in poetical skill on the *Book of the Duchess*. Though so many ideas are borrowed, they are worked into the texture of the poem with much skill; the allegory is extremely ingenious; and the descriptions of the birds and of their conversation are given with the vivacity of a fancy evidently delighted with the humours of the Bestiary.

The *House of Fame* differs from the two allegories just mentioned in not having been composed for a particular occasion. It resembles them, however, in the literary source of its inspiration. We see at once, from the poem itself, that the author wishes to present a moral and metaphysical view of the world in emulation of

[1] On this point see Ward, *Chaucer* (Men of Letters Series), p. 86.

Dante; and this judgment is confirmed by the external evidence of Lydgate, Chaucer's disciple, who, when giving in his Prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, an authentic list of his master's writings, refers to the *House of Fame* under the title of *Dant in English*. From Dante Chaucer borrowed his chief "machine" for the conduct of the action of his poem;[1] details of ideal scenery;[2] mythological allusions;[3] to say nothing of mistakes founded either on the reproduction of his author's errors, or on the misinterpretation of his meaning.[4] But, as in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*, the motive of the poem, though borrowed, is altered and modified so as to form the ground-work of an original conception.

The *House of Fame* is divided into three books, and, like the rest of Chaucer's poems of this kind, is thrown into the form of a dream. We have to listen at the opening to a long dissertation on the nature of dreams, and are then told of a particular dream which the poet had on the 10th of December, probably, as it was on a Thursday, in the year 1383.[5] He finds himself in his dream inside the temple of Venus, which is painted throughout with scenes from the *Æneid*, and these are described at such length that the entire first book is occupied with an abstract of Virgil's poem. On leaving the temple he tells us that he was suddenly seized upon by an eagle and carried up among the stars; and the second book relates his conversation with the eagle concerning the various natural phenomena they encountered in their flight. Deposited at last in the region where the House of Fame is situated, the poet observes that it is built on a

[1] Chaucer, *House of Fame*, bk. i. 500. Dante, *Purgatorio*, ix. 19.

[2] Chaucer, *House of Fame*, i. 488. Dante, *Inferno*, i. 64, xiv. 8. Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 1130. Dante, *Purgatorio*, iii. 47.

[3] Compare references in *House of Fame* to Phaethon (942), and Icarus (920) with Dante, *Inferno*, xvii. 106-111.

[4] Dante speaks of Statius as *Tolosano* (*Purgatorio*, xxi. 89). Chaucer calls him "The Tholosan." Chaucer supposes the "Marsia" of Dante, *Paradiso*, i. 20, to be a woman; see *House of Fame*, 1229. On this whole subject see Professor Skeat's very instructive remarks (*Chaucer*, iii. viii.).

[5] Skeat, *Chaucer*, iii. p. xi.

huge rock of ice, one face of which is always melting under the influence of the sun's rays, while the other preserves immutably the names inscribed upon it. He then describes the inside of the temple, the person of the goddess, who is seated in it, and the great pillars which bear up the roof, each of which is formed by the famous work of some poet or historian. Among these are the History of the Fall of Jerusalem by Josephus; the Story of Troy as told by Homer, Dares, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne, and Geoffrey of Monmouth; the Wars of Cæsar and Pompey by Lucan; together with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Statius' *Thebais*, and Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine*. The poet sees various companies of men coming into the temple with different requests to the goddess, who makes her award according to her arbitrary caprice, and by the mouth of her representative, the god Æolus; the respective judgments being announced by the sound of two trumpets, Laud and Slander. Going out of the temple the traveller sees his eagle sitting on a rock, and is carried by him into a building called the House of Dædalus, where he watches the meeting of all kinds of rumours, and observes how Truth and Falsehood mingle and struggle together to get passage into the world. After this, he says, he saw a person of authority; and then the poem breaks off abruptly. The lines which follow 2158 of Book iii. in Thynne's edition were added by way of conclusion, and are partly from the hand of Caxton and partly from that of Thynne.

The method of composition followed in the poem, thus briefly analysed, is exceedingly instructive. Chaucer, it has been already said, was obviously desirous of emulating Dante, and was indebted to that poet for some of his leading ideas. Dante is a herald of the classical Renaissance. But his *Divine Comedy* is a faithful reflection of the philosophy of the Schoolmen; and wherever he has recourse to pagan mythology, he transmutes his materials into a theological form. In Chaucer's metaphysics, on the other hand, the unalloyed classical influence is already seen to be gaining the upper hand. The groundwork of the

*House of Fame* does not lie in any fundamental conception of Dante's, but in Ovid's famous and splendid description of the abode of that goddess, in the twelfth book of the *Metamorphoses* :—

> Orbe locus medio est inter terrasque fretumque
> Cælestesque plagas, triplicis confinia mundi :
> Unde quod est usquam, quamvis regionibus absit,
> Inspicitur, penetratque cavas vox omnis ad aures.
> Fama tenet, summaque domum sibi legit in arce :
> Innumerosque aditus ac mille foramina tectis
> Addidit, et nullis inclusit limina portis.
> Nocte dieque patent. Tota est ex ære sonanti ;
> Tota fremit, vocesque refert, iteratque quod audit.
> Nulla quies intus, nullaque silentia parte.
> Nec tamen est clamor, sed parvæ murmura vocis :
> Qualia de pelagi, si quis procul audiat, undis
> Esse solent : qualemve sonum, cum Jupiter atras
> Increpuit nubes, extrema tonitrua reddunt.
> Atria turba tenet : veniunt leve vulgus, euntque :
> Mixtaque cum veris passim commenta vagantur
> Millia rumorum, confusaque verba volutant.
> E quibus hi vacuas implent sermonibus aures :
> Hi narrata ferunt alio : mensuraque ficti
> Crescit et auditis aliquid novus adjicit auctor.
> Illic Credulitas, illic temerarius Error,
> Vanaque Lætitia est, consternatique Timores,
> Seditioque repens, dubioque auctore Susurri.
> Ipsa quid in cœlo rerum pelagoque geratur
> Et tellure videt, totumque inquirit in orbem.

Having appropriated Ovid's allegory, Chaucer's next business is to prove, after the fashion of the Schoolmen, and by the example of Dante, that it is a reasonable one. For this purpose he, in the first place, makes use of an eagle, the symbol of soaring contemplation, who performs for him the same service as Beatrice, or Theology, performs for Dante, by explaining the physical phenomena witnessed in their heavenly journey. This learned fowl proves to the poet, by the theory of sound, that the slightest murmur of earth must mount through the air to the House of Fame, and, as they soar through the heaven, Chaucer notes, after the manner of Dante, how true had been the physical and metaphysical observations of his

authorities, Plato,[1] Boethius,[2] Martianus Capella, and Alanus de Insulis.[3] Arrived at his celestial goal, he breaks up Ovid's fiction, and distributes the various details through an allegory of his own invention, but for the composition of which he is largely indebted to preceding poets, like Dante and Machault, and to encyclopædic authors, like Vincent de Beauvais.

In following this line of invention Chaucer shows great liveliness and originality of thought, but at the same time a lack of that complete mastery over his art to which he afterwards attained. The *House of Fame* stands at an immeasurable distance below the *Divine Comedy*. One of the main beauties in Dante's design is the perfect balance between its philosophy and its poetry. By distributing the abodes of the blessed through the nine spheres of the planetary system, he conformed his imaginative conception to what was then believed to be scientific truth, so that every known or supposed law of physics is represented in him as having its counterpart in some analogous form of spiritual existence. Moreover, by completing his journey to the very centre of being, he brought his poem to a natural and appropriate goal. Chaucer, on the other hand, uses his scientific knowledge in support of a mere fiction of his own, and hence, in his *House of Fame*, there is an absence of that sublime and solemn air of reality which is required for a description of the unseen world. As he left his work unfinished, we may suppose that he had passed judgment on his own design: it is indeed obvious that

[1] For in this regioun certein
Dwelleth many a citizein
Of which that speketh Dan Plato.—*H. F.* 929.

[2] And tho thoughte I upon Boece
That writ "a thought may flee so hye
With fetheres of Philosophye
To passen everich element."—*H. F.* 972.

[3] And than thoughte I on Marcian
And eek on Anteclaudian,
That sooth was her descripcioun
Of al the hevenes regioun,
As far as that I saw the preve;
Therefor I can hem now beleve.—*H. F.* 985.

he could not have conducted the action to any satisfactory artistic conclusion.

The *House of Fame* is interesting, apart from its poetical merits, as giving a personal glimpse of Chaucer himself. The following passage shows us how he employed his leisure, after finishing his daily official work in the Customs :—

Wherefore as I said ywis
Jupiter considreth well this,
And also, beausire, of other things,
That is, thou haste no tidings
Of Loves folks, if they be glad,
Ne of nothing else that God made ;
And not onely fro ferre contree
That no tidyngs comen to the,
But of thy very neighebores
That dwellen almost at thy very dores,
Thou hearest neither that ne this,
For whan thy labour al done is,
And hast made al thy rekenings,
In stead of rest and of new things,
Thou goest home to thin house anon,
And also dombe as a stone,
Thou sittest at another boke,
Til fully dased is thy loke,
And livest thus as an heremite,
Although thin abstinence is lite.[1]

It would seem not improbable that, in the lines in which he is first addressed by the eagle, there is an allusion to his wife ; and if this be so, some light would be thrown on the poet's frequent and uncomplimentary references to marriage :—

Thus I long in his clawes lay,
Til at the last he to me spake
In mannes voice and said "Awake,
And be not agast so for shame,"
And called me tho by my name,
And for I should better abrayde
Me to awake, thus he sayde,

[1] The same characteristic is recorded in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* :—

And as for me though that I can but lite,
On bokes for to rede I me delite,
And to hem yeve I faith and ful credence
And in min herte have hem in reverence
So hertely that ther is game none
That fro my bokes maketh me to gone.

*Right in the same voice and stevin*
*That useth one that I could nevin;*[1]
And with that voice, sooth to saine,
My mind came to me again,
*For it was goodly said to me,*
*So nas it never wont to be.*

The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is a poem with a twofold interest, partly from its illustration of the nature of Chaucer's genius, partly as reflecting the conflict of spiritual forces at work within the heart of the Feudal System. Composed about the year 1384, it is plainly connected with the poet's early translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Filostrato;* it contains a recantation of the heresies encouraged by those works; and it reveals the kind of influence which affected Chaucer in his capacity of Court Poet. The poem opens with a reference to the writer's studious and literary disposition, which, says he, is unchangeable except in the month of May, when he is in the habit of going out into the fields for the enjoyment of nature generally, and more particularly for the worship of his beloved flower, the daisy. On one occasion, having set out to watch the flower closing in the evening, he ordered his couch to be made in an arbour, that he might rise in good time to see the petals opening with the day; and while he was sleeping in his arbour, as usual he dreamed. In his dream he saw the god of Love enter with a great company of women, all of whom, since the days of Adam, had been Love's true servants, and chief among whom was a noble Queen, afterwards declared to be the Greek Alcestis. The god, surveying the poet, sternly asked him by what right he was found in the neighbourhood of his flower, though he was well known as a heretic and a rebel:—

For in plain text, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the Romaunt of the Rose,
That is an heresie against my law,
And makest wise folke to withdraw,
And of Creseide thou hast said as the list,
That maketh men to women lesse trist.

[1] Name.

The Queen, however, intercedes in his behalf, and cites, in lines already quoted, the various poems in which he has propagated through the country the true faith of Love. As for the particular offences charged against him, she undertakes that he shall not repeat them :—

> He shal never more agulten in this wyse,
> But shal maken as ye wol devyse
> Of women trewe in loving all her life,
> When so ye woll of maiden or of wife,
> And forthren you as much as he misseide,
> Or in the Rose, or elles in Creseide.

Mollified by the Queen's gracious intercession, the god signifies his intention of pardoning the poet, who acknowledges his goodness with grateful humility, but, with that curious want of tact which he humorously assigns to himself in his dreams, proceeds to enter upon his own defence :—

> Ne a true lover ought me not to blame,
> For that I spake a false lover some shame :
> They oughte rather with me for to hold,
> For that I of Creseide wrote or told,
> Or of the Rose, what so mine author ment,
> Algate God wotte it was mine entent
> To forthren trewth in love and it cherise,
> And to ben ware fro falsnesse and fro vice,
> By which ensample this was my menying.

His more judicious advocate abruptly cuts him short in this defence, and appoints him, as a penance, to tell a certain number of stories, at fixed intervals of time, illustrating the manner in which the love of women has been betrayed by men : —

> And whan this boke is made yeve it the quene,
> In my behalf, at Eltham or at Sheen.

I think the foregoing account of this poem will make the motive of its composition perfectly plain. Times had greatly changed since the troubadours, with lyrical enthusiasm, the Courts of Love, with judicial edicts, André le Chapelain, with dialogues in prose, and Guillaume de Lorris, with allegories in verse, had codified the rules of amorous behaviour in chivalrous society. It is evident

that the satire of John de Meung, highly popular among the middle classes, had produced a profound impression upon the chiefs of feudalism, knightly, clerical, and above all feminine. They perceived that its democratic principles threatened the whole hierarchy of chivalry, and they determined by all the means in their power to stem the tide of obnoxious opinion. The *Legend of Good Women* is among the first fruits of the counter movement, which reached its height in the beginning of the next century, when Christine de Pisan and the famous Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, combined their forces in an onslaught on the mingled impiety and indecency of John de Meung's work. In England the leader of the ladies was no less a person than the good Queen Anne of Bohemia, wife of Richard II., and her influence was brought to bear on the poet whose genius had helped to popularise the heresies contained in the *Romaunt of the Rose* and in the *Filostrato*.[1] Chaucer's prominent position in court circles left him peculiarly open to such an attack, and, unlike some other professors of heresy, he was not desirous of martyrdom. Though his own sympathies were evidently with the rising tide of middle-class opinion, he gave an undertaking, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, to maintain the orthodox tradition of Guillaume de Lorris. He makes his defence very adroitly, partly in his own person, by pleading (though his plea is set aside), that his two poems were only faithful translations, and partly by securing the favour of the queen,—for we can hardly doubt that she is the person allegorised in the character of Alcestis,—with the exquisite refinement of his flattery; thus securing her approval of his orthodox principles, illustrated in those of his compositions to which she particularly refers.

3. Skilful as Chaucer had shown himself in the mere technical use of his art, he had as yet given no proof that

[1] We know from Lydgate, Prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, that the *Legend of Good Women* was written at the request of the queen.

> This poete wrote at the request of the quene
> A legende, of perfite holynesse,
> Of good women.

he possessed great powers of original invention. All that he had done was the work of a clever translator, an ingenious imitator. He had shown that the French system of harmony could be naturalised in the English language. He had reproduced, with more or less happiness, on this newly-formed instrument, the strains of allegorical poetry that found favour in the courtly circles of French minstrelsy; and, in emulation of Dante, he had attempted to present a bird's-eye view of the spiritual world, in the form suggested to him by his school learning. But in these compositions he had followed the lines of art marked out by the allegorical poets allied to the Provençal School, and it is easy to perceive that he was working under conditions not altogether favourable to his genius. His thoughts are strained and artificial, and wanting in the human sympathy and interest which is an indispensable element in all great poetry. Only in one poem, in which he departed from the models furnished by the troubadours, had he advanced with the confident step of an original inventor. *Troilus and Criseyde* doubtless revealed to him the true nature of his genius; and in this direction he sought for the future the path of his development. The *Canterbury Tales* are the full harvest of the art of the trouvère.

The trouvère was the lineal literary descendant of the tribal gleeman, whose business it had been to amuse or flatter his lord by enlivening his meals with story-telling. Originally his tales were doubtless almost invariably of a genealogical character, like the legend of *Beowulf;* afterwards, as taste became more refined and exacting, the bard, while still relying on his poetry with its musical accompaniment, began to vary his oral entertainment with the arts of mimicry and juggling. The careful reader of the *Canterbury Tales* will constantly observe traces of the oral style of narrative,[1] and will infer from such, not only

[1] We see from the closing stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde* that this poem was intended equally for recitation and reading:—

> Go litel booke . . .
>
> So prey I to God that none misse-write thee,
> Ne thee misse-metre for defaute of tunge,
> *And redde wher' so thou be or ellis sunge*, etc.

that Chaucer has adopted this style in order to produce a dramatic effect, but that he has preserved the arts which were actually employed by oral story-tellers for keeping up the attention of an audience. Among these hereditary characteristics may be mentioned the occasional use of interjections;[1] the frequent use of conventional formulæ;[2] the many direct addresses of the story-teller to his company;[3] and the notice he gives of his intention to make a fresh start at some particular point in his tale.[4] Sometimes he will excuse himself to his hearers for not treating them to the long descriptions which the taste of the time leads them to expect:—

> Now wolden some men waiten, as I gesse,
> That I shuld tellen all the purveiance
> The which that th' emperour of his noblesse
> Hath shapen for his doughter Dame Custance.
> Wel may men know that so grete ordinance
> May no man tellen in a litel clause
> As was arraied for so high a cause.[5]

Or again:—

> This Theseus, this duk, this worthy knight,
> Whan he had brought hem into his citee,
> And inned hem, everich at his degree,
> He festeth hem, and doth so gret labour
> To esen hem and don hem all honour,
> That yet men wene that no mannes wit
> Of non estat ne could amenden it.
> The minstralsie, the service at the feste,
> The grete yeftes to the most and leste,
> The riche array of Theseus paleis,
> Ne who sat first ne last upon the deis,
> What ladies fayrest ben or best dancing,
> Or which of hem can carole best or sing,
> Ne who most felingly speketh of love,

[1] Such as *benedicite;* "so mote I the" (so may I thrive); "what!" in the sense of the Anglo-Saxon "hwæt!" *e.g.*—

> What? cherl with sory grace,
> Why art thou all forwrapped save thy face?
> "Pardoner's Tale," 12,652 (Tyrwhitt).

[2] Such as "I dare say no more" (4693), "I can say you no more" (4595), "I can no better sayn" (4462), "There n'is no more to say" (2368).

[3] Such as "Lordings, by this ensample I yow praye" (17,258).

[4] Now wol I stint of this Arviragus
And speke I wol of Dorigene his wif (11,126).

[5] "Man of Lawe's Tale" (4666).

What haukes sitten on the perche above,
What houndes liggen on the floor adoun,
Of all this now make I no mentioun,
But of the effect; that thinketh me the beste;
Now cometh the point, and herkeneth if you leste.[1]

The admirable judgment, of which Chaucer so often gives proof, alike in such criticism as the above and in his own poetical practice, gives us the measure of the loss and gain experienced by the art of minstrelsy, in its transition from the gleeman to the trouvère. Between the *Song of Beowulf* and any of the metrical romances satirised in the *Rime of Sir Thopas*, there is an interval of taste much resembling (due allowance being made for different degrees of civilisation) that which separates the oral epic of Homer from the later literary epic of Apollonius Rhodius. What has been lost in this interval is the spirit of heroic action, swift narrative, vivid presentation of character, animated rhetorical debate. All these qualities are visible in a marked degree in *Beowulf*, just as they are in the *Iliad*. On the other hand, in romances like *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Fortenbras*, and others of their class, the characters of the heroes were transcendental or conventional; and the excessive fondness which the poets exhibit for detailed description shows how much the instinct of action has been impaired by the growth of material luxury and feudal magnificence.

At the same time something has undoubtedly been gained in the art of story-telling. The scald of the northern barbarian nourished his imagination on the mysteries of his tribal beliefs, but he could not escape from their monotony. When, however, the Teuton settled himself in the midst of the ancient civilisation he had conquered, he required his poets to provide entertainment for his rapidly expanding tastes, and the trouvère, in answer to the demand, drew fresh life and imagination from a literature hitherto entirely strange to him. The loss of his native mythology was repaired by the rich stores of ecclesiastical legend, supplied to him by the traditions of monastic Christianity. In place of the heroic

[1] "Knight's Tale," 2192.

legends of his tribe, he was introduced to the fabulous histories of the ancient world, which he recreated for himself in the image of Teutonic feudalism. The Crusades brought him into immediate communication with the East, its tales of magic, and the speculations of its dreamy philosophy. And for all this new matter, so attractive and inspiring to unsophisticated minds, an adequate literary form suggested itself in the Greek novels; from which he learned an art, unknown to the rude minstrelsy of the gleemen, the treatment of the passion of love, whereby variety, contrast, relief, suspense, in a word human interest, was given to the conduct of the fable.

Nor was it only on the chivalrous side that the art of epic poetry among the Teutonic races adapted itself to the change in the constitution of society. As the leaders and chiefs of the barbarous races gradually drew away from their subjects into the seclusion of the castle, a certain number of the gleemen followed them as retainers, but others were left outside without any settled means of livelihood. Dependent as they were on the tastes of all sorts and conditions of men, these roving minstrels were forced to look for new forms of art to gratify popular audiences. The Romance, no doubt the natural outgrowth of the Saga, was a form of poetry well adapted to beguile the *ennui* of the inmates of the castle; but there were large classes of hearers who had neither the leisure, nor perhaps the patience, to wait for the close of its prolix action. In the streets and squares of the cities especially, audiences of this kind could be easily collected to listen, while the trouvère told or chanted some short story, religious, humorous, or pathetic, but always involving a situation of human interest. For this primitive and elemental type of story there was no lack of literary models. Story-telling was always a favourite amusement in the cities of the ancient world, and the Milesian Tales had been preserved and popularised in Italy, furnishing suggestions to Apuleius and others, who had modified the type with various inventions. Another short and popular class of tale was exemplified in the different collections of

*Æsop's Fables*, and a third in the numerous legends of the saints authorised by the Church. When to these was added the host of unaffiliated anecdotes which are always floating on the surface of society, it will be readily seen that no great invention was required from the trouvère to develop in the art of minstrelsy the forms of the *lai* and the *fabliau*.

Taken singly the *fabliau* was too devoid of matter and substance to admit of any high degree of literary development. Here and there a tale might contain in itself enough of the ludicrous or the pathetic to be so constantly repeated as at last to seem worthy of being preserved in writing; but, as a rule, the story-tellers must have owed their success mainly to arts inseparable from their own personality. When, however, the accomplishment of reading became comparatively common, a collection of the more interesting stories was found to afford an agreeable mode of amusement; and, as may be seen from the *Lais* of Marie of France and the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, such collections were made at a very early period, both in the prose and the verse of the languages of modern Europe. Moreover it was soon recognised by the clergy that the art of story-telling was useful for the purposes of moral instruction, to which indeed, in the serious atmosphere of the East, it owed much of its popularity. The first, or nearly the first, collection of stories in Europe was made by Peter Alfonsus, a converted Jew, under the title of *Disciplina Clericalis*, or *Castoiement d'un Fils*, a work which furnished a model and a large amount of matter for the later and more celebrated *Gesta Romanorum*. This latter collection, made before the middle of the fourteenth century, carries its family history on its face; the tales it contains are numerous, and are brought together from a variety of sources, but they are all recast in one mould; each tale relates an incident which is supposed to have happened in the days of a Roman emperor, and the tale itself is followed by an interpretation, which twists the natural sense into an allegory of the scheme of Redemption.

By such means the *fabliau* established its character

as a useful instrument of amusement and edification. When that stage had been reached, the literary trouvère perceived that whatever credit he might himself obtain for invention and art must come entirely from the skill with which he arranged his collected materials. In this department, too, his Eastern predecessors had provided him with models of different degrees of ingenuity. Of these the oldest was the *Fables of Bidpai*, the composition, or rather the collection, of which is supposed to date back for more than two thousand years. A certain king of India, having shown great liberality in his treatment of the poor, has a large treasure bequeathed to him by a hermit, who has partaken of his bounty. Among the heirlooms is a piece of silk inscribed with mystic characters, which, on being interpreted, reveal to the king that another treasure of inestimable value is hidden in the mountains of Ceylon. Thither he accordingly betakes himself, and falls in with the sage Bidpai, who pours forth to him, in rapid succession, the series of tales which constitutes at once the treasure and the book.

A somewhat more complex effort of invention is found in the *Historia Septem Sapientum*, the final title given to a collection of tales, which, under the names of *Syntipas* and *Dolopathos*, were translated, at a comparatively early date, from the Persian into Greek and Latin respectively. The framework of the different stories is here furnished by an initial narrative, relating how a certain king had a son, whose life—so the wise men of the country discovered—was destined to be threatened at a certain age by imminent danger unless he were able to maintain complete silence. The prince, warned of his peril, remains speechless even in the presence of his father, till the king, who is naturally perplexed, commissions one of his wives to find out the reason of this strange behaviour. The woman endeavours to gain the affections of the prince, and he, unable to control his indignation, assails her with violent reproaches, in consequence of which, as was to be expected, a false accusation is laid against him to the king. He is on the point of

being put to death, when the seven wisest men of the kingdom entreat that an opportunity may be given them of investigating the case. The king consents, and the inquiry proceeds by the somewhat remarkable ordeal of story-telling, each of the wise men in turn relating some tale illustrative of the dangers of hasty action, which the wicked queen immediately neutralises by an anecdote leading to a contrary conclusion. This contest is prolonged until the hour of destiny is passed, when the prince's innocence is of course made plain. In this story we seem to see the embryo of the design of the *Arabian Nights*, translations of which began to circulate in Europe in the early part of the fourteenth century.

The *Arabian Nights* differs from the *Fables of Bidpai* and the *History of the Seven Wise Masters*, in so far as it is a collection made exclusively for the purposes of amusement. And in this respect it may have furnished a precedent for Boccaccio, who, when he designed the *Decameron*, was certainly not particularly solicitous about the moral improvement of his hearers. But Boccaccio far surpassed his Eastern predecessors in the artfulness of the fiction round which he grouped his materials. In every previous collection of tales there had been something improbable or extravagant in the invention of the circumstances which were supposed to give occasion to the story-telling; and this unreality was in some degree reflected in the tales themselves. Boccaccio, by connecting the time and place of his stories with an episode of real life, diffused an atmosphere of mingled beauty and truth over the whole collection. Not only did he find an opportunity for producing, in his account of the plague at Florence, an historical description which rivals the parallel passage in Thucydides, but he provided himself with a plausible apology for the effrontery of some of his tales.[1] Whether or not such a company of ladies

[1] "E da questo essere abbandonati gl' infermi da' vicini, da' parenti, e dagli amici, et avere scarsità di serventi, discorse un uso quasi davanti mai non udito, che niuna, quantunque leggiadra o bella o gentil donna fosse, infermando non curava d' avere a' suoi servigi uomo, qual che egli si fosse, o giovane o altro . . .; il che, in quelle che ne guarirono, fu forse di minore onestà, nel tempo che succedette, cagione."—Introduction to the *Decameron*.

and gentlemen ever met, as he asserts, in a beautiful garden, and entertained each other, while the plague was at its height, with amusing stories and melodious songs, it must be allowed that the Florentine novelist, by giving this setting to the floating anecdotes he had collected from so many quarters and repeated with such easy grace, conciliated the prejudices of human nature with profound art.

From the foregoing sketch it will be easy to gather what were the leading rules of mediæval story-telling after it reached its literary stage. In the first place, so far from originality being required from the trouvère in the invention of his subject matter, any such attempt on his part would have been considered as a demerit, since every tale was, in the Middle Ages, regarded as a historic example of moral truth. In the second place, since the object of the trouvère was now mainly to gratify the taste of the *reader*, it was his business to provide the latter with a large collection of stories full of action and variety. In the third place, the reputation of the trouvère for poetical skill depended on the beauty and propriety of the form in which he contrived to give unity to his collection of miscellaneous materials. Looking at him in these various aspects, Chaucer's right to be esteemed the first, as he is certainly the greatest, of the English literary trouvères is, I think, incontestable. Though Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* is full of stories, that poem is composed not in the spirit of a trouvère, but of a monk, being in its design nothing but a succession of homilies to which the stories themselves are tacked by way of illustration. Whether Chaucer can be said to have been anticipated in any point of his art by Gower, is a question that I propose to consider when I come to deal with that poet. In the meantime it is certain that Chaucer was the first Englishman to *write* metrical stories for their own sake. In the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale" he mentions the story of Ceyx and Alcyone as the work of his youth, and in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, which was written before the appearance of the *Confessio Amantis*, he tells us that he had already composed the tale of "all the love of

Palamon and Arcite." It is not improbable that the story thus referred to—probably a rather close translation of the *Teseide*—was the original germ of the "Knight's Tale"; and when Chaucer resolved to publish a collection of stories he no doubt possessed many materials ready to his hand. The scheme of the Canterbury pilgrimage was, however, not designed till the last decade of the fourteenth century, and, contemplating as it did a hundred and sixteen tales, proved too large to be completed before the poet's death.

No one who examines this design, even in its unfinished state, can fail to observe how far the invention of Chaucer excelled that of all previous trouvères, not excepting Boccaccio himself. Nine-and-twenty persons, of whom Chaucer is one, are supposed to have met at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, on the eve of a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The host of the inn offers to show them the way, and proposes that, to enliven the road, each of them shall tell two tales on the journey to Canterbury, and two more on the return to London. His suggestion being approved, the company, which is made up of all ranks and orders of English society, set out on the following morning. The action of the poem consists of the incidents of the pilgrimage and of the tales related by the travellers, which are linked to each other by prefaces describing the circumstances under which each narrator performed his task.

Now, if this plan be compared with Boccaccio's, it will be seen that, while the occasion of the story-telling in the *Canterbury Tales* is not less real and lifelike than in the *Decameron*, Chaucer's scheme possesses two distinct advantages over the other, in the first place as regards the conduct of the action, in the second place as regards the arrangement of the materials. The action of the *Decameron* lacks movement and variety. When the novelist has once set his ladies and gentlemen in the midst of their garden, and has settled that ten stories shall be told on each day, and that on each day a king or queen shall be appointed to regulate the proceedings, the machinery of the action is entirely automatic. One

day resembles the next in containing the same amount of singing and story-telling: when one tale is ended another begins, with no more interval than is required to describe the laughter, the blushes, or the applause of the audience. The merit of the performance lies entirely in the manner in which the stories are told; all that relates to the story-tellers themselves is mechanical and monotonous.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, on the contrary, this picturesque symmetry is entirely wanting. The vicissitudes of the pilgrimage largely determine the character of the stories, and the action of the poem is varied by the passions of the company. Though the host is appointed to act with all the absolute powers of a master of the ceremonies, he is not always able to control the course of events. Thus, when he has settled that precedence shall be determined by lot, and when, to the great satisfaction of the cavalcade, the lot has fallen on the Knight, the latter has hardly finished his tale, when order and decency are rudely disturbed by the intervention of the drunken Miller. The character of the story itself, by the feelings it arouses, sometimes gives rise to a sequence of fresh tales, as when the Wife of Bath's views of marriage provoke a quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure. At other times an unexpected incident, like the arrival of the Canon's yeoman, furnishes a motive for the story; moreover, the audience themselves are not slow to interrupt a story-teller who becomes tedious or offensive. Thus the interest of the poem lies not so much in the tales told, as in the life, humour, and vivacity of the pilgrims who tell them.

Again, with regard to the distribution of the materials. The main object of the literary trouvère was to collect appropriate subjects, and Chaucer, with his habits of encyclopædic study and omnivorous reading, had amassed a supply of stories, not indeed so numerous as those collected by Boccaccio, but covering a wider range of tastes and interests. The following scheme shows the various subjects of the *Canterbury Tales* and the sources from which the poet derived them:—

| Narrator. | Subject. | Source. |
|---|---|---|
| Monk | Tragedies { sacred | Boccaccio, *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium.* |
| | { secular | Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica.* |
| Parson | Sermon on Seven Deadly Sins | Homilies. |
| Nun's Priest | Cock and Fox | *La Somme des Vices et des Vertus.* |
| Prioress | Boy killed by Jews | Le Roman de Renart, "Si comme Renart prist Chanticler le coc." |
| Second Nun | Legend of St. Cecilia | "Miracles of our Lady," Vernon MS. |
| Pardoner | Death and the Robbers | *Legenda Aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine, or a Latin Life of St. Cecilia. |
| Sompnoure | The Friar's Legacy | *Cento Novelle Antiche.* Oriental origin, *Vedabbha Játaka.* |
| Frere | The Sompnoure and the Devil | Fabliau, *Le dit de la Vescie a Prestre.* |
| Clerk | Story of Griselda | Latin story, *Promptuarium Exemplorum.* *Narratio de quodam Senescallo Sceleroso*, and *De Advocato et Diabolo.* |
| Knight | Palamon and Arcite | Boccaccio, who took it from an old French story, *Parement des Femmes.* |
| Squire | Magic Horse, Ring, Mirror | Boccaccio, *Teseide*, and Statius, *Thebais.* |
| Franklin | Dorigene and Arviragus | *Thousand and One Nights.* Marco Polo. |
| Man of Law | Story of Custance | Boccaccio, *Decameron*, x. 5. Original in *Vetála Panchavinsati.* |
| Doctor | Story of Appius and Virginia | Fabulous Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet. |
| Merchant | January and May | *Roman de la Rose.* |
| Shipman | The Monk, the Merchant, and his Wife | Fables of Adolphus. Tale of Eastern origin, *Bahár i Dánush.* |
| Manciple | The Talking Bird | Boccaccio, viii. 1. Evidently founded on *fabliau.* |
| Reve | Miller of Trompington | Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ii. 9, *Romans des Sept Sages*, English version, fourteenth century, "Proces of the Sevyn Sages." |
| Canon's Yeoman | The Canon's Alchemy | *Gombert et les deux Clercs* (*fabliau*). |
| Miller | The Carpenter and the Clerk | Original. |
| Cook | The Prentice (unfinished) | Some *fabliau.* |
| Wife of Bath | (1) Story of her Married Life | Some *fabliau.* |
| | (2) The Loathly Lady | (1) *Roman de la Rose.* *Valerius ad Rufinum.* St. Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum.* |
| Chaucer | (1) Sir Thopas | (2) Same source as Gower's *Story of Florent.* |
| | (2) Melibœus | (1) Parody of Romances. |
| | | (2) Translation of *Le Livre de Melibee et de dame Prudence.* |

It will thus be seen that Chaucer levied contributions for his story-telling on the Fathers of the Church, on Homilies, on Legends of the Saints, on Scholastic History, Secular History, and Fabulous Chronicles, on Fables and Animal-tales, on Romances and Lays, on Latin poetry, and on French *fabliaux*, and on the tricks and frauds of the scientific charlatans of his times. Few poets would have had invention enough to dispose artistically of all these miscellaneous materials: an audience like Boccaccio's would have refused to listen to the Monk's Tale, and would have scattered in dismay at the Parson's Sermon; but in the large and diversified company to which Chaucer introduces us there is a representative of every kind of human interest, who, when his turn comes, is allowed to indulge his own taste in stories, at least up to a certain point. When this point of tolerance is passed, the audience begins to criticise, so that even the most dismal 'tragedy" and the most long-winded romance acquire in their context a certain interest, partly because they are told in character, and partly because the judgments passed on them by the pilgrims reflect the temper of society at large. Again, the dramatic character of the design furnishes an apology for the tone of some of the tales. Chaucer is very emphatic in reiterating the argument of "authority" which he had previously advanced in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women.*

> What shuld I more say but this Millere
> He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
> But telde his cherles tale in his manere:
> Methinketh that I shall rehearse it here:
> And therfore every gentle wight I pray,
> For Goddes love, as deme not that I say
> Of evil intent, but that I mote reherse
> Hir tales alle, al be they better or worse,
> Or elles falsen some of my matere;
> And therefore who so list it not to here
> Turne over the leaf, and chuse another tale,
> For he shal find ynowe both grete and smale,
> Of storial thing that toucheth gentilesse,
> And eke moralite, and holinesse.
> Blameth not me, if that ye chese amiss.[1]

[1] Miller's Prologue (Skeat, iv. p. 91).

The remarkable judgment and invention, shown by Chaucer in the handling of his dramatic machinery, is nowhere seen to greater advantage than in the use which he makes of two characters, the Host and himself. Harry Bailly is precisely the person required to preserve order and unity among the story-tellers. As the keeper of an inn, he is acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men. He is neither above nor below the morals of his company; not exempt himself from the vice of swearing, which brings upon him the reproof of the Parson, but with sufficient justness of feeling to allow him to distinguish the inconsistency between the religious professions and the practice of the Monk. A quick wit and tolerably wide sympathies make him an appreciative listener to stories of every kind. At the same time he is something of a critic, whose principle is always *ne quid nimis*. Like the Greek chorus, he is ready to pronounce judgment on every situation; hence his character appears in a variety of lights, according as he feels called upon to reprove the drunken Miller, to keep the peace between the Frere and the Sompnoure, or to address the other members of the pilgrimage in appropriate tones of politeness or irony. He is respectful to the Knight, courteous to the ladies, sarcastic to the clergy, authoritative with the "churls." As to Chaucer's own part, besides the duty which naturally falls to him of giving a minute description of all the persons and incidents of the pilgrimage, he introduces himself with much pleasantry as the reciter of a tale which he means to be ridiculous; when this is cut short in the middle, he makes his failure an excuse for resorting to prose, whereby he is able to economise for the occasion one of his unpublished compositions.

Viewed as a whole, the *Canterbury Tales* reflect every aspect of the trouvère's art, and show how it adapted itself to the changes in the constitution of society. The tale, in its original form the most elementary kind of imitation, became, when employed by the Church for the purposes of moral instruction, an "ensample" appended to a homily; afterwards, as the idea of amusement

gradually prevailed over that of instruction, the tale itself assumed the place of importance, and the moral was only tacitly inferred from it. Hence sprang the revived principle of the direct imitation of nature,—so long buried under the allegorical modes of interpretation encouraged in the Church schools,—and acquired a constant growth of life and strength from the study of classical literature. In the "Parson's Tale" (which is no tale) we find an example of the unadorned style of teaching through the homily; there are one or two specimens of stories told in immediate illustration of some religious or philosophical doctrine, notably the "Monk's Tale," the "Pardoner's Tale," and the "Tale of Melibœus"; while a few others, such as the "Wife of Bath's Tale," the "Manciple's Tale," and the "Nonnes Priest's Tale," contain "ensamples" of more secular truths. But in the more elaborate stories, such as "Griselda," "Custance," "Dorigene and Arviragus," "January and May," "Palamon and Arcite," "The Magic Horse, Ring, and Mirror," the interest is concentrated almost exclusively in the various situations and incidents. This class displays the literary art of the trouvère in its full development. On the other hand, the short and farcical stories of common life, founded almost invariably on *fabliaux*, like the tales of the Reve, the Miller, the Sompnoure and the Frere, are little more than revivals of the oral method of the story-teller in its rudimentary stages, and borrow either the traditions of folk lore or anecdotes of the old Milesian order.

In no epic poet has the direct imitation of nature ever been carried so far as in Chaucer. It is the very essence of his style. I have already cited the lines in which he excuses himself for the matter of the "Miller's Tale" by the character of the narrator. In the following passage in the Prologue he lays down the same principle as broadly and with even greater plainness:—

> Who so shal telle a tale after a man,
> He moste reherse, as neighe as ever he can,

Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudely and so large;
Or elles he moste tellen his tale untrewe,
Or feinen thinges, or finden wordes newe.
He may not spare, although he were his brother,
He moste as wel sayn o word as another.
Crist spake himself ful brode in holy writ,
And wel ye wote no vilanie is it.
Eke Plato sayeth, who so can him rede,
The wordes moste ben cosin to the dede.

To the same principle we owe his minute and delicate record of details in dress, person, and behaviour. It is needless to say that the Prologue to the *Tales* is a mine of observation, but two passages may be cited from it in illustration of the fine contrasts of Chaucer's style. The first is from the portrait of the Prioress:—

At mete was she wel ytaught withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
That no drope ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.[1]
Hire over-lippe wiped she so clene,
That in hire cuppe was no ferthing[2] sene
Of grese, whan she drunken hadde hire draught.

With this dainty lady compare the following details from the description of the Miller:—

His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,
And thereto brode as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and thereon stode a tufte of heres,
Red as the bristles of a sowes eres.
His nose-thirles[3] blacke were and wide.

This management of poetical *chiaroscuro* is contrived without any violation of probability, because, on a pilgrimage, differences of rank for the moment naturally disappeared. Aware, however, of the prejudices of his readers, Chaucer thinks it advisable to apologise for not presenting

[1] Pleasure. [2] Spot. [3] Nostrils.

the companions of his journey according to their degrees in society,[1] and throughout the narrative he is most careful to give a just representation of external forms and behaviour. His "Knight's Tale" is a faithful mirror of feudal usages: in the "Man of Law's Tale" he censures some of his predecessors for imputing to one of the persons in the story an action which would have involved a breach of etiquette.[2] So strict, indeed, is his adherence to truth and nature, that, though he died before the completion of his design, it is easy to follow the operations of his mind in the arrangement of his various materials. We can see that he found it impossible to carry out the plan proposed by the Host, that each of the company should tell *two* tales on the road to Canterbury, and that he changed his mind more than once with regard to what may be called the *articulation* of the narrative of the pilgrimage.[3] On the other hand it is plain that he meant the stages of his poetical pilgrimage to conform minutely with what would have been the course of real life. In the journey from London to Canterbury four days were generally consumed, and the recognised halting-places on the road were Dartford, Rochester, Ospring. Now from the incidental mention of times and places in the *Canterbury Tales* we are able to infer that Chaucer intended to make this distribution of the journey the framework of his narrative, so that the various tales, even in the incomplete state of the main narrative, can be assigned with much probability to the day on which they were actually told.

The travellers set out from the Tabard at daybreak escorted by the Miller and his bagpipes, and the first

[1] Also I pray yow to foryeve it me
Al have I nat set folk in hir degre
Here in this tale as that they sholde stonde.

[2] "Man of Law's Tale," Skeat's *Chaucer*, iv. p. 162, v. 988.

[3] Thus we have the beginning of a tale told by the Cook, although we find in the main narrative that the Cook, when called upon by the Host to tell a story, was by no means in a fit state to fulfil his undertaking. Again we are told that when the Monk began his story the pilgrims were in sight of Rochester. The Monk is exceedingly prolix, yet though it is certain that the company must have slept at Rochester, the Host, after he has stopped him in the midst of his tragedies, proceeds to requisition the Nun's Priest for a tale.

mention of time occurs after the latter has told his tale, when the Host observes :—

> Lo Depeford, and it is half-way pryme,

*i.e.* 7.30 A.M. It may be supposed that the roads in the neighbourhood of London were more carefully mended than in the remoter districts where we know, alike from the *Canterbury Tales* and from external evidence, that they were little better than quagmires.[1] The pilgrims, at any rate, though they were so well advanced on their journey at this early hour, do not seem to have gone farther than Dartford, the usual halting-place on the first day; for in the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale," the poet makes the Host take an astronomical observation in order to ascertain the day and the hour :—

> He wist it was the eighteteethe day
> Of April ;

and

> It was ten of the clokke he gan conclude ;

and it is plain enough that this determination of the date would not have occurred on the same day as the mention of the time of arrival at Deptford and Greenwich. A fairly well-connected series of tales brings the travellers, on the second day, to Rochester, where they would have slept. The Squire must have told his story on the third day, for he makes a fresh reference to the time of day :—

> I wol not taryen now for it is pryme,

*i.e.* 9 o'clock. He must have been followed later in the day by the Wife of Bath, whose strongly-pronounced views on marriage give rise to the quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure, which, it appears, took place when they were in the neighbourhood of Sittingbourne. Here the party no doubt dined, resting for the night at a place which is not named, but which external evidence determines beyond doubt to have been Ospring. Early on the

[1] See Prologue to the Nonnes Prieste's Tale (Skeat, vol. iv. p. 270) :—

> I sholde er this have fallen doun for slepe
> Although the slough had never been so depe.

morning of the fourth day a laughable incident occurs. The Cook, who has been at an early hour drinking freely of bad ale, falls off his horse at a place which it is now difficult to identify :—

> Wite ye not wel wher stant a litel town
> Which that y-cleped is Bob-up-and-down,
> Under the Blee in Canterbury weye ?

and afterwards, near Boughton under Blee, the pilgrims are overtaken by the Canon and his Yeoman, who must also have been sleeping at Ospring. This was probably in the afternoon, for the Yeoman observes :—

> Sirs, now in *the morwe tyde* [*i.e.* the morning]
> Out of the hostelrye I sey yow ryde.

The last stage on the road is appropriately occupied with the sermon of the Poor Parson.[1]

Looking back over this survey of Chaucer's poetical progress, we find scarcely one of his works in which we are not called upon to admire the presence of a powerful and penetrating genius. When the language came into his hands it was rude and inharmonious, inadequate to express either the complex ideas of philosophy or the finer shades of character ; when he left it it had been endowed with a copious vocabulary, refined syntax, musical numbers ; it was fitted to become the vehicle of a noble literature. In one sense Chaucer is the poet of the Schools. Brought up in the nurture of encyclopædic learning, an intense intellectual curiosity carried him into studies which must have crushed a feebler mind, equipped with a necessarily imperfect instrument of expression. But the treasures that he drew from theology, astronomy, and alchemy were seldom used, as is so often the case in the *Romance of the Rose* and other poems of the mediæval period, for the mere purpose of display, but were devoted to the enrichment and illustration of his art. Again, there is a sense in which Chaucer is an imitative poet. He admired with all the enthusiasm of fine taste the more finished art

[1] See as to the order of the Tales Skeat's *Chaucer*, vol. iii. 374-80.

of the poets of France and Italy, and felt no scruple in transferring bodily many of their thoughts and sentiments into the English tongue; he borrowed, however, not from poverty but from enterprise, and used the poems of his contemporaries or predecessors, as a banker uses the deposits of his customers, for the enlargement of his own fortunes.

As a court poet, employing the allegorical methods of the successors of the troubadours, Chaucer was no doubt trammelled by the use of an art with which his genius was only half in sympathy; yet within these conventional limits his work always shows judgment and invention. As the lineal descendant of the trouvères his success was far greater. In him the epic genius of national romance reached its culminating point: he was the last and the greatest representative in English of the mediæval art of story-telling. Half-conceptions were formed in later days of possible epics founded on legendary English themes. Milton meditated a poem on "King Arthur," and Pope a poem on "Brutus"; but it is plain that any attempt to execute such designs must have ended in failure: the subjects were not suited for the purpose. Chaucer, the literary representative of the almost obsolete minstrel, gave to the *roman*, the *lai*, the *fabliau*, the proper and only form which epical romance could assume in our language. Two centuries after him Spenser sought to complete what had been

> Left half told,
> The story of Cambuscan bold;

but his tale lacks human interest. The same poet in *Mother Hubberd's Tale* carried on the tradition of his predecessor from the *Tale of the Cock and the Fox*, only to show, however, how far the old mediæval Æsopic humour had fallen into decay; while Dryden, in spite of the splendour and harmony of his verse, invested the beast fable in his *Hind and Panther* with an atmosphere of absurdity. The author of the "Squire's Tale" and the "Nun's Priest's Tale" has neither second nor third in his art.

By his treatment of the story Chaucer immediately prepared the way for still nobler poetry of a different class. The development of the art of the trouvère furnishes a notable example of that natural evolution of the drama from the epic which Plato and Aristotle notice in Greek literature. From the earliest times the chant or recitation of the minstrel, containing as it did dialogue as well as action, involved a certain amount of dramatic imitation, and to this was added, when the story began to assume a literary form, the more intricate development of plot and character. When he had introduced a variety of highly-finished characters into a single action, and had engaged them in animated dialogue, Chaucer had fulfilled every requirement of a dramatist, short of bringing his play upon the stage. It is true that his conception of the drama was in itself rudimentary, and was formed, like Langland's, upon the Miracle Plays, in which the *dramatis personae* were made to speak primarily for the purpose of instruction; so that he sees no impropriety in putting such a speech as this into the mouth of the Pardoner:—

> By this gaude[1] have I wonnen yere by yere
> An hondred mark sin I was Pardonere.
> I stonde like a clerk in my pulpet,
> And whan the lewede peple is doun yset,
> I preche so as ye han herd before,
> And telle an hundred false japes more.
> Than peine I me to stretchen forth my necke
> And est and weste upon the peple I becke,
> As doth a dove, sitting upon a berne:
> Myn hondes and my tonge gon so yerne,[2]
> That it is joye to see my besinesse.
> Of avarice and of swiche cursednesse
> Is all my preching, for to make hem fre
> To yeve hir pens, and namely[3] unto me.
> For min entente is not but for to winne,[4]
> And nothing for correction of sinne.
> I recke never whan that they be beried,
> Though that hir soules gon a blake beried.

Nor has he any idea of tragedy in the Shakespearian sense of the word. The progress of the trouvère's art

[1] Jest. [2] Briskly. [3] Especially. [4] Only to get money.

was not favourable to the treatment of the sublime or the pathetic: Chaucer rarely attempts either, and when he does, usually has recourse to the machinery of interjections and apostrophes, by way of hinting to his audience that it is time to display a little emotion.[1] On the other hand we find in the *Canterbury Tales* all the elements of the Elizabethan comedy. The Host, the Miller, the Reve, the Wife of Bath, and the like, were the thoroughly English models for Falstaff, Bottom, Dogberry, and all that large army of nameless representatives of the working world, with which Shakespeare enlivened the action of his more serious plays.

Again, in his capacity of trouvère, Chaucer shows himself to be the father of English satire. As far indeed as the more directly moral side of satire was concerned, the art of story-telling did not lend itself readily to the use of ridicule for purely didactic purposes, and the situations in most of the tales in which the narrators lampoon each other's characters are mainly farcical. Nevertheless, moral and literary judgments are very skilfully, though indirectly, conveyed; sometimes by means of contrast, as where the virtues of the Poor Parson are made to reflect on the defects of his order; more commonly through irony, as in the portrait of the Monk[2]:—

> He gave not of the text a pulled hen
> That saith that hunters ben not holy men:
> Ne that a monk, whan he is rekkeles,
> Is like to a fish that is waterles;
> That is to say, a monk out of his cloistre.
> This ilke text held he not worth an oistre,

[1] When the "Soudannesse" in the "Man of Law's Tale" meditates a massacre, Chaucer apostrophises her thus:

> O Soudannesse, rote of iniquitee,
> Virago, thou Semyramee the secound,
> O serpent under femininitee,
> Like to the serpent depe in helle y-bound,
> O feined woman, all that may confound
> Vertue and innocence thurgh thy malice
> Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice.

[2] Compare also Prologue, vv. 227-232, 251-257. "Sompnoure's Tale," 7370. (Tyrwhitt.) For ironical literary criticisms compare the method of "Sir Thopas" with the admirably humorous apostrophe to Geoffrey de Vinsauf, author of the *Nova Poetria*, in the "Nonnes Priest's Tale," Tyrwhitt, 15,353, and see Tyrwhitt's note on this line.

> And I say his opinion was good;
> What shulde he studie, and maken himselven wood,
> Upon a boke in cloistre alway to pore,
> Or swinken with his hondes, and laboure,
> As Austin bit? how shal the world be served?
> Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.

But it was above all in the nice observation of inconsistencies in conduct, the power of selecting what is typical in manners and character, the art of drawing finished and various portraits in verse, that Chaucer showed the way to the poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His descriptions of men are as comprehensive as Dryden's, his pictures of women as minute as those of Pope; but he is a more genial painter than either, and his satire leads us to survey mankind with toleration rather than contempt.

To sum up all these excellences of Chaucer in a single phrase, he is the first *national* poet of England. Not indeed that the feeling of nationality is anywhere prominent in his poetry, as it is in that of Shakespeare, or that he has consciously emerged from the envelope of Feudalism and Scholasticism, in which the thought of Europe was still swathed. There is no mention of Crecy or Poitiers in the praises of his Knight, whose great reputation has been acquired solely in warfare with the infidel. There is none of the anti-papal feeling, so conspicuous in Langland, among the Canterbury pilgrims, faithful children of a Church whose education has done much to form and direct the thought of all of them, even of the poet himself. Yet the foundations of Chaucer's art are not laid exclusively either in the encyclopædic education or in chivalry. In his picture of the Canterbury pilgrimage, with the frankness of criticism prevailing among all its members, with the strength of its public opinion, with its power of regulating its own affairs, we find, what as yet had nowhere else appeared in modern European literature, the image of an organised *nation*. This revived idea of civil society, overlaid since the fall of the Roman Empire by the great educational structure of the Church, furnishes the groundwork of the political Renaissance.

Concurrently with the conscious growth of civil liberty, there came almost inevitably a change in the fundamental conceptions of art. Poetry was removed from the regions of Metaphysics, Allegory, and Theology, and from the deductive methods of thought encouraged by encyclopædic science, and began to be reanimated by the old classical principle of the direct imitation of nature. Once more it was perceived, however dimly, that "the purpose of playing, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature"; once more it was felt that "the proper study of mankind is man." When the truth of this principle in art was realised, it was rapidly developed in other European countries, by Ariosto, by Cervantes, by Molière, but to Chaucer must be assigned the honour of having led the way. The principle has often been carried in practice, and not seldom by Chaucer himself, into illegitimate coarseness and materialism. From the mild irony of his remarks on the sporting inclinations of the Monk, and from the tolerant amusement with which he describes the quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure, we might infer that he was indifferent in his moral judgments. Born dramatist as he was, he may sometimes have felt with Shakespeare that

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players.

But, on the other hand, the imperishable portrait of the Poor Parson, in its true and simple beauty, shows us that his genial humour was only one aspect of his imaginative view of life, and that with him, as is the case with all the greatest poets, the moral is to be looked for not in the artist's motive, but in his art.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EPICAL SCHOOL OF CHAUCER—GOWER, LYDGATE, OCCLEVE

In one respect the course of English poetry presents a singular contrast to the parallel development of the art in Greece and Rome. It may seem strange that when poetry in England had made with Chaucer such characteristic beginnings in so many different directions, nearly two centuries should have passed before his work was in any way advanced. When Æschylus began his improvements, Attic tragedy was rapidly carried by his successors through all the further stages of which it was capable. When Ennius had given the first indications of the harmonies inherent in Latin, one poet after another followed in his steps, until the versification of the language was perfected by the skill of Virgil and Horace. But in England, between Chaucer and Surrey, scarcely a writer appeared who can by a stretch of indulgence be regarded as a poet of the first or even of the second class. After the death of the former those peculiarly modern notes which his muse had sounded died away, and were not heard again until Shakespeare and his contemporaries revived them on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.

Nevertheless English poetry, though a tree of slow growth, furnishes in its history groups of well-marked phenomena which illustrate the law of its progress. At long intervals we may observe a remarkable efflorescence of genius among poets and novelists resembling each other in their aims and endowments; and these periods

of inspiration are invariably followed by times of comparative torpor in which the power of imaginative production seems almost to have ceased. Such epochs of action and subsequent reaction are found at the close of the reign of Edward III., and through the reign of Richard II., when the chief representatives of English poetry were Langland and Chaucer; at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and through the reign of James I., when the drama reached the zenith of its glory; in the reigns of Anne and George I., the "Augustan" period of wit and correctness; and in the last years of the reign of George III., and in the reign of George IV., which witnessed the revival of the Romantic school. There is too much regularity in these appearances to allow us to ascribe them simply to the fortuitous influence of individual genius; and indeed, when they are examined, it is seen that they correspond closely with the ebb and flow of moral and intellectual movements in the life of the nation at large.

For it will be observed that, in English history, the periods of greatest activity in literature do not coincide precisely with the most glorious periods of political action; the harvest of thought and expression follows the mental exaltation arising from great deeds, and comes to a close as the energy and enthusiasm of the national movement exhaust themselves, or are counteracted by the tide of opposing forces. Thus, to take the examples with which we have become familiar in the course of this history, the poetry of Langland represents the sum of all those feelings which had been working in the mind of the more reflective part of English society, and particularly in its Anglo-Saxon element, since the times of John and Henry III.; the national dislike of the interference of a foreign ecclesiastical power with domestic affairs; the shock given to the general conscience by the violent contrasts between religious profession and religious practice, especially in the monastic orders; the attempt to constitute an ideal of life for all orders of the community founded on practical principles

of piety and justice. These sentiments, thrown into dogmatic shape by Wycliffe and his followers, translated into exaggerated action by John Ball, Jack Straw, and the revolting villeins, find their highest form of poetical expression in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman;* the ebb of the movement is marked partly by the reaction against the Lollards under Henry IV. and Henry V., reflected in a literary form in the poetry of Occleve; and partly by the revival of strict orthodoxy among the ruling classes, which derived poetical nourishment from the numerous devotional treatises in metre produced by John Lydgate, the monk of Bury St. Edmunds.

Again, the poetry of Chaucer represents the high-water mark of the movement in the direction of municipal self-government among the middle classes, which is so plainly visible in France, Flanders, and England during the fourteenth century, embodying itself in such characters as the Van Arteveldts or Etienne Marcel, and in such political organisms as the parliaments of Richard II. The Canterbury pilgrimage, as has been already said, is a kind of poetical microcosm, in which all the orders of English society are seen mixing in the freedom of daily intercourse, criticising each other's conduct, and delivering their own opinions on religion, morals, and taste. Then comes the reaction in poetry as well as in politics. As the growth of the power of Parliament, prematurely rapid during the reign of Richard II., was checked first by the strong character of his immediate successors, and afterwards by the agony of dynastic feudalism in the Wars of the Roses; so, when the social springs of inspiration failed, did the dramatic spirit and artistic judgment of Chaucer disappear from the work of those who called themselves his disciples. The forces of feudalism are seen to resume their sway. Instead of the stories of common life developed from the *fabliau;* instead of the moving adventures of Griselda and Constance anticipating the pathetic action of the later drama; the reader finds himself again in the exhausted regions of romance, travelling under the direction of Lydgate through the thrice-

told tales of Thebes and Troy, in the midst of narratives of Paladins of the class of Sir Thopas; or wandering, in later times, with Stephen Hawes through labyrinths of courtly allegory, constructed after the models of Guillaume de Lorris. The appearance above the horizon of the sun of the Renaissance with all its light, freshness, and human interest, has been no longer than a February day in the Polar regions.

It is a significant fact that, until the appearance of Dryden's famous criticism, the causes of Chaucer's superiority to all the poets of his time seem never to have been rightly understood. He was regarded either as one of the early improvers of our language, as a successful story-teller, or as an allegorical poet of the Court of Love; and in these various capacities we find him generally ranked by his contemporaries, as well as by his successors up to the middle of the seventeenth century, with Gower. There is good reason for believing that Chaucer himself felt strongly the injustice of this verdict; but he would not have demurred to the general grounds on which it was based; and as the question is one which throws considerable light on the progress of our poetry, I propose to examine in some detail the relations existing between these two poets.

Chaucer and Gower were originally friends. When the former had completed his *Troilus and Criseyde* he dedicated it to the "philosophical Strode and moral Gower"; and Gower paid a compliment to Chaucer through the mouth of Venus towards the close of the first version of his *Confessio Amantis*:—

> And grete wel Chaucer whan ye mete,
> As my disciple and my poete.
> For in the floure of his youth,
> In sundry wise, as he wel couth,
> Of ditties and of songes glade,
> The which he for my sake made,
> The lond fulfilled is over all;
> Whereof to him in speciall
> Above all other I am most holde.
> Forthy now in his daies olde
> Thou shalt him telle this message,
> That he upon his later age,

> To sette an end of all his werke,
> As he which is min owne clerke,
> Do make his testament of love,
> As thou hast do thy shrifte above,
> So that my court it may recorde.[1]

There is nothing to show when these lines were composed, but in 1393 ("the sixteethe yere of King Richard") Gower produced a new edition of the *Confessio Amantis* from which the compliment to Chaucer was removed. Chaucer, on his side, inserted before the "Man of Law's Tale" in the Canterbury pilgrimage, which must have been published shortly before or after the date just mentioned, a Prologue containing a severe reflection on the morality of two of the tales in the *Confessio Amantis;* and not content with this criticism, he returned to the attack in the tale itself, and blamed Gower, though without mentioning him by name, for misrepresenting a particular incident recorded in it.

The only plausible suggestion that has been offered for the suppression of the lines in the *Confessio Amantis*—namely, that Chaucer was at the time in political disgrace[2]—besides being discreditable to Gower, is inconsistent with the fact that his poem is dedicated to Henry of Lancaster, the son of John of Gaunt, Chaucer's old friend and patron. Nor is it easy to see why Chaucer should have gone out of his way to find an opportunity for censuring Gower, unless he were under the influence of some strong personal feeling. For not merely does his Prologue insist on the impropriety of telling stories like those of Canace and Apollonius of Tyre, but it asserts, without any manifest necessity for such a digression, the transcendent merits of Chaucer as a voluminous story-teller. The whole combination of circumstances, in fact, can only be explained by assuming the existence of professional jealousy between the two poets. On this hypothesis the facts of the case are easily intelligible. Chaucer had been the first to show how the English language

[1] *Confessio Amantis* (Carisbrooke Library), p. 442.

[2] *Confessio Amantis of John Gower.* By Dr. Reinhold Pauli. Introductory Essay, p. xv.

might be harmoniously adapted to French models, in the octosyllabic metre and the seven-line stanza of five accents. He had been the first to tell, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, an extended story on a dramatic plan. He had also written one or two shorter tales or gestes after the manner of Boccaccio, a thing which had not before been attempted in English verse. But he had as yet formed no collection of stories linked together by a central design, and Gower, by accomplishing this feat in his *Confessio Amantis*, had, to that slight extent, entitled himself to the credit of priority of invention. Gower's work had doubtless many admirers, some of whom may have exalted his genius as superior to that of Chaucer. The latter would certainly have been piqued, even while his invention was stimulated, by a preference which he knew to be unjust; and when he formed the design of the Canterbury pilgrimage, it would have been natural for him to reflect on his rival in the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale." Resentment at this attack, or—if the second edition of the *Confessio Amantis* preceded the publication of the *Canterbury Tales*—the friction rising out of constant and odious comparisons, would have led Gower on his side to suppress the early compliment to a friend from whom he was now estranged.

Of the life of John Gower few memorials remain. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is probable that he was somewhat older than Chaucer, and he outlived him by eight years, dying in 1408. Connected with a knightly family, the Gowers of Suffolk and Kent, his birth and position account for the strong vein of feudal and ecclesiastical feeling which prevails in his works, and for the absence of that sympathy with the humours of bourgeois life which marks the poetry of Chaucer. He had lands at Otford on the Darent, and acquired the manors of Kentwell Hall in Suffolk and Feltwell and Moulton in Norfolk. Late in life he appears to have taken orders,[1] and to have married quite in old age (1397)

[1] He held the living of Braxted Magna in Essex. H. Morley, *English Writers*, iv. 156.

one Agnes Groundolf. Three years after his marriage he became blind, and the eight years before his death were spent in the Priory of St. Mary Overies, now St. Saviour's, Southwark, which he had repaired at his own expense. The church of the Priory contains his monument, where he is represented with his head resting on his three chief works, written in French, Latin, and English; namely *Speculum Meditantis*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*.

Besides the works just mentioned, Gower, probably while young, composed in French fifty ballads, which show him to have been a complete master of that language, and thoroughly versed in all the conventional rules required of poets who treated the subject of love according to the traditions of the Provençal school. The ballads are written sometimes in seven, sometimes in eight-lined stanzas of octosyllabic verse, with the usual burden, and with combinations of recurrent rhymes. They show a careful attention to the laws of metrical harmony, but have no individual character.

Of the *Speculum Meditantis*, in spite of the assertions of Warton and others,[1] no trace remains under that name. From its title we may reasonably infer it to have been of a religious character. The *Vox Clamantis*, on the other hand, is a didactic poem, and though composed with a fine contempt for the rules of Latin prosody, and with no very high respect for those of Latin syntax, possesses considerable interest, as illustrating the history of the time and Gower's own character. It was inspired by the rising of the commons under Wat Tyler, of which, as a landholder of Kent, the poet had had personal experience, and which, after describing it with deep abhorrence and a certain amount of humour, he makes the text for an inquiry into the state of the various orders of English society. The first and much the longest book is occupied with the description of a dream, in which the poet sees all the domestic animals go mad. Asses refuse to bear burdens, oxen to plough; dogs become beasts of prey; birds and insects combine for the destruction of the land. The assembled animals are addressed by Watte the jay, who advises

[1] *History of English Poetry* (1840), vol. ii. p. 226. But see Note at the end of this Chapter.

them to rise and destroy the law. From this picture of anarchy Gower turns, in the second book, to prove that the world is governed by God, not by Fortune; the third book describes the disorders of the different elements of society, according to the division recognised by Wycliffe and Langland—clergy (*oratores*), knights (*bellatores*), labourers (*laboratores*)—and dwells especially on the vices of the secular clergy; the fourth exposes the faults of the monastic orders; the fifth of the knights and the villeins; while the sixth inveighs against the lawyers. The seventh and last book deals with the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The *Vox Clamantis*, viewed historically, is worthy of detailed study, but I confine myself to selecting from it two passages, the former of which illustrates the character of the poet, while the latter may be read in connection with the parallel passage in *Piers Plowman's Vision* respecting the food of the working classes in the reign of Richard II. In the following lines Gower recites the words of the celestial voice which he heard in his dream:—

Immo tibi potius modo provideas, quia discors
Insula te cepit, pax ubi raro manet.
. . . . . .
Semper agas timidus, et quæ tibi læta videntur,
Dum loqueris fieri tristia posse putes.
. . . . . .
Otia corpus alunt, corpus quoque pascitur illis,
Excessusque tui damna laboris habent.
Gaudet de modico natura, sed illud abundans,
Quod nimis est, hominem semper egere facit.
Te tamen admoneo, tibi cum dent otia tempus,
Quidquid in hoc somno visus et auris habent
Scribere festines, nam somnia sæpe futurum
Judicium reddunt.

*Vox Clamantis*, i. 2022.[1]

[1] Nay rather make provision for thyself, since thy lot has fallen in an island full of civil discord, where peace rarely abides. . . . Always act with timid caution; and deem that what seem to thee to be joys may even while thou speakest turn to sorrows. . . . Leisure nourishes the body; the body too thrives upon it; and thy excesses have all the ills of labour. Nature rejoices in moderation, but superfluity ever makes men to want. I advise thee, however, when leisure gives thee the opportunity, make haste to write whatever has filled eye and ear during this sleep, for dreams often afford a true revelation of the future.

In these lines we seem to see a reflection of the natural timidity which, after the rising of the commons, prompted the poet to look for a peaceful asylum in the Priory of St. Mary Overies. The following passage, describing the daintiness of the labouring classes after the Black Death, shows, when compared with the sentiments of Langland, how wide-spread were the apprehensions in society caused by the villeins' revolt :—

> Omnia salsa nocent tantum, neque cocta placebunt,
> Ni sibi des assum murmurat ipse statim.
> Nil sibi cervisia tenuis neque cisera confert ;
> Nec rediet tibi cras ni meliora paras.
> . . . . . .
> His nisi justitia fuerit terrore parata,
> Succumbent domini tempore, credo, brevi.[1]

The character of the *Vox Clamantis* no doubt procured for Gower the "moral" reputation which Chaucer recognises in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, and prepared the way for the composition of the *Confessio Amantis*. This work was undertaken at the command of the king, who met the poet, as the latter tells us in his first edition, coming to London by water, and requested that he would write something in English. Gower, being at the time in poor health, seems to have embarked on his enterprise without much enthusiasm. A certain poverty of invention is visible in the "moral" design of the *Confessio*, the Prologue of which is nothing but an abstract of the line of thought pursued in the *Vox Clamantis*. It mainly consists of a survey of the history of the world, regarded as an illustration of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. "But man himself," says Gower, "must also be regarded as a microcosm, and the conflict and disorder, rising out of the mixed elements that compose his nature, are the

[1] All salt foods are merely hurtful ; nor will baked meats satisfy him ; if you don't give him roast he forthwith grumbles. He thinks nothing of small beer and cider ; nor will he come back to work on the morrow unless you find him something better. . . . If exemplary justice be not executed on these men, my belief is that the lords will be shortly ruined.—*Vox Clamantis*, v. 641. Compare the passage from the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* on p. 222.

causes of the anarchy of the world at large." He will write, he says, partly of the old world, partly of the new. In the old world Love bore rule, and then were the days of Peace, Health, Righteousness, and Charity. But in the new world all this is changed: "Love is fallen into discorde," and the ancient order is everywhere in confusion. Look at the clergy: instead of guiding their lives by the primitive standard, they follow the rule of simony, and hence arise schism and heresy. Some men say that these evils are caused by Fortune, but those who look deeper may see that good or bad fortune is the consequence of men's own conduct. By the light of Nebuchadnezzar's dream Gower proceeds to the conclusion that he lives in times on which "the ends of the world are come." The division and disorder he sees about him he believes to be the fruit of man's sin, which was the original cause both of the war of the elements, and of the civil war between body and soul. Would that some second Arion might arise to restore the discordant contraries once more to harmony!

And now no more
As for to speke of this matere,
Which none but only God may stere,
So were good if at this tyde
That every man upon his syde
Besought and prayed for the peace
Which is the cause of all increase,
Of worshippe, and of worldes welthe,
Of hertes reste and soules helthe.
Without peace stonde no thing good.
Forthy to Crist, which shed his blood
For peace, byseketh alle men,
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen.

When he passes from his Prologue to the poem itself, Gower shifts his ground. He tells his readers that he has no hope of restoring the world to its right balance, and that he means to write about love, a word to which he now attaches a new sense. Love, through the body of the poem, is regarded as the great disturbing force among mankind; and the poet illustrates his doctrine

from his own experience. Without any attempt to produce verisimilitude by using the conventional machinery of dreams, after the manner of Chaucer and the French poets, Gower relates how, being in the agonies of love, he went out into the woods and met with Cupid and Venus, the former of whom, in the usual way, increased his suffering by transfixing him with a dart. Venus, he says, treated him with more compassion, ordering him to confess to her priest, Genius, who, first of all, explained to him how closely love was associated with the senses by the gates of sight and hearing, and then showed the connection between love and the Seven Deadly Sins, analysing them point by point, asking the penitent at each stage as to the state of his mind, and illustrating every answer by one or more stories. In this way seven out of the eight books which compose the poem are filled with tales: the seventh book is occupied with an abstract of the *Secretum Secretorum*, or the course of instruction supposed in the Middle Ages to have been given by Aristotle to Alexander. When Genius, in the course of the confession, has contrived to tell one hundred and twenty stories, the poet thinks it time to make a "supplication" to Venus, that his love may be requited as he deserves, or else that he may die. In answer to this prayer, Venus at first contents herself with a sermon. Old men, she says very wisely, have no business to be in love:—

> My sone, if that thou well bethought,
> This toucheth the, forgete it nought,
> The thing is torned into "was";
> The which was whilome grene gras
> Is welked heie as time now.[1]
> Forthy my counseil is that thow
> Remembre well how thou art olde.

This sage advice by no means avails to cure the poet of his malady; but he almost immediately perceives Cupid attended by "all the world of gentle folk that were whilome lovers"; among whom he observes such

[1] What was formerly green grass is now become withered hay.

catholic examples as Tristram and Belle Isolde, Lancelot and Gunnor (Guenevere), Jason and Creusa, Samson and Dalilah, to say nothing of Aristotle and the Queen of Greece, by whom the philosopher was saddled and bridled, or of Virgil, who was in love with an emperor's daughter. Cupid, having conferred with his mother, takes the dart out of the poet's wound, which Venus then dresses with healing ointment. Much eased by this treatment, the lover excites the mirth of the goddess :—

> Venus beheld me than and lough,
> And axeth, as it were in game,
> "What love was?" and I for shame
> Ne wiste what I shulde answere;
> And netheles I gan to swere
> That "by my trouth I knewe him nought";
> So fer it was out of my thought,
> Right as it hadde never be.

He asks, however, to be shriven by Genius before Venus and her priest depart; and this request is granted.

Having thus brought the body of his work to a conclusion, Gower, with a fine disdain for anything in the shape of artistic transition, proceeds to tack on to the Confession a moral, which seems to connect the poem with the Prologue. He prays the Creator of the world,—

> That he this londe in siker waie
> Woll set upon good governaunce;
> For if men take in remembraunce
> What is to live in unité,
> There is no state in his degré
> That ne oughte to desire pes,
> Withoute which it is no les[1]
> To seche and loke into the past,
> There may no worldes joie last.

He then exhorts the "clergie," the "chevalrie," the lawyers, and the traders, to amend their lives, and finally points out to the king himself the duty imposed upon him by his office. After which he concludes :—

> And thus forthy my finall leve
> I take now for evermore,
> Withoute making any more

[1] Profit.

Of love, and of his dedly hele,
Which no phisicien can hele ;
For his nature is so divers
That it hath ever some travers,
Or of to moch or of to lite,
That plainly may no man delite,
But if him faile, or that or this.
But thilke Love which that is
Within a mannes herte affirmed,
And stont of Charite confirmed,
Such Love is goodly or to have,
Such Love may the body save,
Such Love may the soule amende,
The highe God such Love us sende
Forth with the remenaunt of grace,
So that above in thilke place,
Where restith Love and alle Pes,
Our joie may ben endéles.

The *Confessio Amantis* is an interesting example of the evolution of the mediæval epic style in England. The central conception whereby the series of tales is grouped round the Seven Deadly Sins appears to be suggested by the *Handlyng Synne* of Robert of Brunne. In that work, however, the tale plays only a subordinate part, being thrown in as a concession to the weakness of "lewd" men, to whom it might be otherwise difficult to impart the wholesome doctrine of the homily. The great original of compositions like Mannyng's is found in the "Dialogues" of Gregory the Great: their motives are primarily ecclesiastical ; and most of the tales in the *Handlyng Synne* are derived from clerical sources, the works of Gregory himself, those of St. Basil, the *Acta Sanctorum*, and the *Vitæ Patrum*.

In Gower's day this predominantly didactic purpose in story-telling, so intimately associated with the discipline of the monastery, had become old-fashioned, if not quite obsolete, and his avowed motive of composition was different :—

But for men saine, and sothe it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To hem that shall it all day rede ;

I wolde go the middel way,
And write a boke betwene the twey,
Somewhat of lust somewhat of lore,
That of the lesse or of the more
Some man may like of what I write.

Gower's "lore" is contained partly in the comprehensive philosophy of his Prologue, partly in the theological machinery of the Seven Deadly Sins; the latter being modified to suit the tastes of laymen by the introduction of Venus, Cupid, and Genius, while the allegorical idea of confession is borrowed either from the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, or from the *Romaunt of the Rose*. The conception is thoroughly scholastic, but the scholasticism is used as a framework for fiction. A variety of entertaining stories is grouped round a scheme of Catholic theology familiar to all readers, and so far the design is well conceived. But Gower had not sufficient art to blend his ethics and his poetry into a consistent whole. He fails to make it plain in what way the sins are connected with love. Sometimes they seem to be treated allegorically, after the manner of Guillaume de Lorris, as though the poet intended to show what were the deadly sins in a lover. Sometimes they are treated literally, as offences against the moral law arising out of the passion of love. The sins are moreover so minutely subdivided, for the purpose of introducing fresh stories, that the classification becomes unmeaning: for example, under the head of Pride we find the separate subdivisions, each illustrated by stories, of Boasting and Vainglory. The stories themselves, from a moral point of view, are marked by the same confusion of thought. Some of them relate to love as well as to the deadly sin; but quite as many illustrate the deadly sin without having any reference to love.[1] The poet often strays into irrelevant moralising, as when, under the head of Sloth, he considers the question "what is Gentilesse" (Gentility);

[1] Under the head of Pride, for instance, we find the sub-vice of Surquedrie (Presumption) illustrated simply by the story of the Trump of Death, in which there is no mention of Love (lib. i. p. 110, Pauli's edition); and the sin of Vainglory has no other example than the story of Nebuchadnezzar (p. 136).

while he himself acknowledges that his Seventh Book, on the *Secretum Secretorum*, has nothing to do with his subject. This book is in fact introduced either for the mere display of the writer's learning, or, more probably, to meet an objection that might be raised against the poem as a whole, for its want of direct religious purpose.

Gower thus stands midway between Robert of Brunne and Chaucer. He has passed beyond the stage of art in which a story is told primarily for the sake of the moral it conveys. Yet the moral is with him apparently quite as important as the tale, and, as he declares in his Prologue, he provides for the instruction as well as the amusement of his readers. We are still in the Middle Ages. Gower never approaches that direct imitation of nature, that dramatic portraiture of men and women, which makes the life of the *Canterbury Tales*. The idea of an action giving unity to a collection of varied narratives; of characters so disposed as to make the action at once interesting and progressive; and of such a relation between the character of the story-teller and the story, that the one may seem to speak in conformity with the natural course of events, and the other to suggest a natural moral; all this is beyond him.

Between Chaucer and Gower there is, in fact, all the difference that distinguishes the man of genius from the man of accomplishment. Yet Gower's poetical qualities, especially when compared with those of his immediate successors, are of a high order. He is a good story-teller, excelling particularly in picturesqueness of description. In the Story of Florent, which is the same in substance as that told by the Wife of Bath in the *Canterbury Tales*, his picture of the Loathly Lady is perhaps more vivid than Chaucer's :—

> Florent his woful hed up lifte,
> And sigh this vecche[1] where that she syt,
> Which was the lothliestë wyght
> That ever man cast on his eye.
> Her nase base,[2] her browes high,

[1] Saw this old woman : (*vecchia*).

[2] Flat.

Her eyen smal and depe set,
Her chekes ben with teres wet,
*And rivelin*[1] *as an empty skin*
*Hangend down unto the chin,*
Her lippes shrunken ben for age;
There was no grace in her visage,
Her front was narwe,[2] her lockes hore,
She loketh forth as doth a more.[3]

His slighter touches have often great brilliancy, as—

There was a lady the sliest
Of alle that men knewen tho,[4]
*So olde she might unnethes go,*
*And was graundame to the dede.*[5]

Two old men are thus characterised—

And as a busshe which is besnewed
Here berdes were hore and white.[6]

Sometimes this picturesque fancy clothes itself in allegory:—

Upon the bench sittend on high
With Avarice Usure I sigh,
Ful clothed of his owne suite,
Which after gold maketh chase and suite,
With his brocours that renne aboute,
Liche unto racches[7] in a route.
Such lucre is nonne above ground
Which is nought of the racches found.
For whan they se beyete[8] sterte,
That shal hem in no wise asterte,[9]
But they it drive into the net,
Of lucre, which Usure hath set.

And the allegory is often marked by subtle conceit, as when the eye is described as the heart's cook in matters of love.[10]

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[1] Wrinkled. [2] Her forehead was narrow. [3] A witch. [4] Then.
[5] So old that she could scarcely go, and was grandam to the dead.—This image may have been suggested by the Mother of Death, a familiar figure in the Miracle Plays. See Sharp's *Dissertation on the Coventry Mysteries*, pp. 53-4.
[6] Their beards were as hoar and white as a bush covered with snow.
[7] Hounds scenting. [8] What is acquired, profit. [9] Escape.

[10] Right as min eye with his loke
Is to min herte a lusty coke
Of Loves fode delicate.

Gower shows some power of imagining feeling dramatically in an ideal situation. Thus when the Loathly Lady asks Florent, in fulfilment of his promise, to take her for his wife :—

> He wot nought what is best to sain,
> And thought as he rode to and fro
> That chese he mote one of the two—
> Or for to take her to his wife,
> Or elles for to lose his life ;
> And then he cast his avauntage,
> That she was of so grete an age
> That she may live but a while,
> And thought to put her in an ile,
> Where that no man her sholde knowe,
> Til she with deth were overthrowe.

He is by no means without humour, and takes evident delight in the oddity of his learning. Aristotle's subjection to the power of love is thus described :—

> I sigh then Aristotle also,
> Whom that the quene of Greece al so
> Hath bridled, that in thilke time
> She made him such a silogime,
> That he forgate all his logique.
> There was none arte of his practique,
> Through which it mighte ben excluded,
> That he ne was fully concluded
> To love, and did his obeisaunce.

The metrical style of Gower in his octosyllabic verse is nimble and fluent. Each of his lines contains, as a rule, eight syllables : the sentences, not unduly prolonged, end generally with the first rhyme of the couplet ; sometimes, but seldom, in the middle of the verse. He employs, of course, many words which have become obsolete, but it is usually easy to gather his meaning. His syntax, however, shows much of the awkwardness to be expected from a musician who is master only of a rude instrument. He often fails to make his words follow the natural order of the thought, either because he is prevented by reminiscences of Anglo-Saxon grammar, or because he tries to imitate the Latin. He is in the

habit of placing the verb after the noun it governs, and it is possible that this inversion, which is frequent even in the verse of the eighteenth century, may be partly due to the necessities of rhyming verse. But the inversion of the order of the sense is often carried in Gower to excess, as in such a sentence as this:—

> And that I take into recorde
> Of every lond for his partie
> The common vois, which may not lie,
> Nought upon one but upon alle,
> It is that men now clepe and calle,
> And sain that regnes ben devided;

that is: "And to bear witness to that, I take, for its own part, the general voice of every land, which may not lie, for it is not only in one, but in all, that men cry out and exclaim and say that realms are divided."

Frequently a sentence beginning with one construction is concluded with another, as—

> But for men sain, and sothe it is,
> That who that al of wisdom writ,
> It dulleth ofte a mannes wit,

*i.e.* "But since men say, and truly, that when a man writes of nothing but wisdom, it often dulls his wit."

In his structure of the royal stanza, Gower models himself on the French, and often produces very musical effects, as—

> Upon myself this ilke tale come,
> How whilom Pan, which is the god of Kinde,
> With Love wrestled and was overcome;
> For ever I wrestle, and ever I am behinde,
> That I no strengthe in all min herte finde,
> Whereof that I may stonden any throwe;
> So far my wit with love is overthrowe.

From what has been said it must be clear that, in the judgment of posterity, there can be no question of any rivalry between Chaucer and Gower. In the most characteristic quality of his genius, his dramatic power, Chaucer stands unapproachably alone among the poets of the period. In their capacity of literary trouvères,

both poets had certain common aims: each saw that, to make their native language a harmonious literary instrument, the best method was to refine it on French models. But Chaucer can claim priority of invention: he had translated the *Romaunt of the Rose*, written the *Book of the Duchess*, and adapted *Troilus and Criseyde* before Gower began to compose in English. Gower on his side is to be credited with having made the first collection of tales in metrical English, and he deserves high praise for the number and variety of his stories, and for the tuneful facility of his narrative style. He was also the first to arrange his miscellaneous epic materials by means of a central design. But in this respect he was himself an imitator, and the plan of the *Confessio Amantis* cannot compare in invention and propriety with the splendid scheme of the Canterbury pilgrimage. On the whole, making due allowance for his talents and accomplishments, it is not unjust to describe him as a poet of the school of Chaucer.

If Chaucer stands so far in advance of one who, in his own day, and long afterwards, was reckoned as his rival, a still greater interval separates him from the poets who were proud to avow themselves his disciples. Chaucer died in, or about, 1400, and through almost the whole of that century poetical imagination, thought, and invention, seem, in England at all events, to have been asleep. And not only so, but the metrical system which Chaucer had established, imperfectly understood by his successors, fell into decay, so that, between his death and the advent of Surrey, the language suffered a distinct loss of harmony. Yet poor as they are in art, the works of Lydgate and Occleve, the chief English poets of the first half of the fifteenth century, have a certain interest for the historian of poetry. In the first place they show that, while the poetical impulse of the fourteenth century has been completely exhausted, the literary taste which it created survives. The number of readers largely increases; the patron begins to appear; the English language is recognised as having a "rhetoric" of its own; and poets

receive commissions to execute metrical works in it, just as the painter is engaged to beautify by his art the shrine or the altar.

Again the slackening tide of imagination in society at large gives more opportunity for the expression of personal interests, and a striking feature in the poems of both Lydgate and Occleve is the frequent introduction of autobiographical passages. Finally, their system of versification—and particularly Lydgate's—though rude and inharmonious, is, for that very reason, historically instructive, as showing the natural forces which were preparing the language for the metrical changes made by the poets of the sixteenth century.

John Lydgate—"Dan Johan" as he is called by Shirley—was born, probably about 1370,[1] certainly at Lydgate near Newmarket, from which place he derived his name, and which he mentions more than once in his poems, in rather a disparaging manner.[2] An idle boy, who caused his friends much trouble and expense while at school, he was placed at the early age of fifteen in the Benedictine Monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, where he spent his noviciate.[3] In 1388 he there received the four lower orders of the Church; he was ordained deacon in 1393; and priest in 1397.[4] There is some evidence to show that from Bury he had been sent for study to Oxford, possibly to Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College) which was connected with the Benedictine Order.[5] One of his biographers states that after finishing his education in England "he went

[1] Lydgate tells us in his Prologue to the *Story of Thebes* that it was written when he was "nie fiftie yere of age," and this must have been between the years 1420 and 1422. For all facts relating to Lydgate the reader may usefully refer to the edition of the *Temple of Glass*, published by the Early English Text Society, and edited by Herr J. Schick; one of those admirable monographs for which students of our early literature are so deeply indebted to the industry of German scholars and their English collaborators.

[2] I was borne in Lydgate
Where Bacchus licour doth full scarsely flite.
Lydgate, *Falls of Princes.*
Have me excused, I was born at Lydgate.

[3] See his *Testament* in the edition of his poems by Halliwell, pp. 254-59.

[4] *Temple of Glass* (Schick), lxxxvii. [5] *Ibid.* lxxxviii.-ix.

to Paris to learn the languages"[1] and we know from his own account that during his life he had travelled far.[2] Tradition, of a very shadowy kind, enrols him as a member of the University of Padua;[3] but we have no positive evidence of his being abroad till 1426, when he himself states that he was employed at Paris to translate into English a poetical pedigree, composed in French to prove that Henry VI. was the true king of France.[4] We may suppose at any rate that, after entering the monastery and while completing his education, he discovered that he possessed powers of versification; and it may further be fairly concluded that his first attempts at composition were of an allegorical kind. Poetry of this class was in considerable vogue in the first years of the fifteenth century in consequence of the reaction, headed by Christine de Pisan and the Chancellor Gerson, against John de Meung's contribution to the *Roman de la Rose.* Lydgate's allegorical poems include among others *Flour of Curtesie*, *Temple of Glass*, *Assemble of Gods*, *Court of Sapience*, *Reason and Sensuality:* in most of these he doubtless followed his fancy; but one or two, notably the *Temple of Glass*, may have been written to order; all of them were probably produced before 1411.

After that date a fresh current of taste began to manifest itself. At the command of Prince Henry, afterwards Henry V., Lydgate undertook in 1412 the translation of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Trojana.* The future conqueror of Agincourt had perhaps no strong taste for the insipidities of allegorical poetry, and preferred the action and adventure of romance. At any rate Lydgate's pro-

[1] Bale, *Scriptorum Britanniæ Summarium*, p. 202 (1548).

[2] I have been offte in dyvers londys,
And in many dyvers Regiouns
Have eskapyd fro my foois hondys,
In Citees, Castellys, and in touns;
Among folk of sundry naciouns
Wente ay forth, and took noon hede.
*Temple of Glass*, p. lxxxix.

[3] *Ibid.* p. lxxxix.

[4] *Ibid.* p. xciii.

ductive powers were turned in the latter direction during that king's reign. The 30,000 lines which filled the *Troy Book* occupied him, as he tells us, till the eighth year after the coronation of Henry V., *i.e.* till 1420.[1] Scarcely was this task finished when he was required by another patron to condense, from the epic of Statius, the companion *Story of Thebes*, a comparatively short work, which, at his rapid rate of composition, would not have taken him more than a year, and would therefore have left him time to write for the chivalry of the day the story of *Guy of Warwick*, before his election as Prior of Hatfield in 1423.

Lydgate's work now begins once more to indicate a turn in the tide of taste. During the long minority of Henry VI., accompanied as it was by the decline of the English power in France, a demand for reading of a devotional kind seems to have sprung up among the nobility, which the Monk of Bury was frequently called upon to satisfy. Summoned to Paris by the Earl of Warwick, as has been already said, to turn into English Callot's poetical pedigree of the young king, the poet was in the same year commissioned by the Earl of Salisbury to translate the first part of De Guileville's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, an enormous allegory extending to 22,000 lines. As if this labour of Hercules were not sufficient, the unfortunate man was next set by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the Mæcenas of the day, to make an English version of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, some "tragedies" of which had already been transferred by Chaucer into his "Monk's Tale." The prospect of this fresh penance seems to have been almost too much for Lydgate's endurance. His description of his state of mind, when anticipating his toils, reminds

[1] And tyme complet of this translacyon
Was a thousande and foure hondred yere,
And twenty nere—I knowe it out of drede,
The eyghte yere, by computacyon
Suyng after the coronacyon
Of hym—. . . . Herry the fyfthe.
*Temple of Glass* (Schick), p. ci.

us of Pope's nightmares, after first embarking on the translation of the *Iliad*:[1]—

> Thus my self remembrying on this boke
> It to translate how I had undertake,
> Ful pale of chere, astonied in my loke,
> Myn hand gan tremble, my penne I felte quake.
> . . . . . .
> I stode chekmate for feare when I gan see
> In my way how littel I had runne.

Considering that he was between sixty and seventy years of age, and that his work ran to 36,000 lines, these apprehensions are very intelligible. Nevertheless his indomitable industry, and the aid of a French translation, carried him through. But he can have had little time to attend to his religious duties; and this may have been the opinion of his fraternity, for in 1430 a new prior is found in command at Hatfield, and in 1434 Lydgate obtained a "Dimissio" from that monastery, and returned to Bury, where he spent the remainder of his days. The year before his return he had been commissioned by the abbot to write the *Legend of S.S. Edmund and Fremund*, in honour of the visit of Henry VI. to the monastery, and here in 1438, among the scenes of his early years, he completed his gigantic labours on the *Falls of Princes*. His wits, as he says in his *Life of Albon and Amphabel*, composed in 1439, were now "fordulled," yet the poor monk, patient as one of Curll's poets, continued to place his pen at the service of those who might require it, and, according to Stowe, was employed to write the verses for the pageant in honour of Queen Margaret's entry into London in 1445. A small yearly pension had been granted to him, and payment of it is recorded as late as 1446,[2] soon after which year he must

[1] Compare Pope's confession to Spence (*Anecdotes*, p. 218):—"What terrible moments does one feel after one has engaged for a large work! In the beginning of my translating the *Iliad* I wished any one would hang me a hundred times. It sat so heavily on my mind at first that I often used to dream of it, and do sometimes still."

[2] Perhaps, as Herr Schick ingeniously suggests, in response to the request made to Duke Humphrey of Gloucester at the close of his *Falls of Princes*—

> Trusting ageynwards your liberal largesse
> Of this quotidyan shall releven me
> . . . . . .
> Hope seyd, ye, my lord, should have compassion,
> Of royale pitye support me in mine age.

have died, literally pen in hand, while in the midst of a translation of the *Secretum Secretorum*.[1]

The above is evidently a record of the life of a literary purveyor, or hack; and viewed as such, the works of Lydgate are of some value in marking the fluctuations of poetical taste in the first half of the fifteenth century. Beyond this they have little merit. In respect of invention and power of design he seems to have been altogether wanting. He regarded himself as the follower and disciple of Chaucer, but he shows no real insight into the genius of that great poet; and when he calls him his "maister" he means no more than that he is imitating his external forms of expression. Of his allegorical poems, as represented by his *Temple of Glass*, something more will be said in the next chapter, but considering him mainly in his capacity of story-teller, his deficiencies as an original poet may be best illustrated from his *Story of Thebes*. In this he follows the footsteps of Chaucer with feeble servility. The "story" is preceded by a Prologue —a kind of sequel to the *Canterbury Tales*—in which, after copying Chaucer's manner of fixing the date, Lydgate describes how he fell in with the pilgrims at an inn in Canterbury; and then, having recapitulated his master's portraits of some of the leading characters, proceeds to relate how the host bade him tell a story. The tale he told was of course the *Story of Thebes*, and this is a mere abstract of the *Thebais*,—or rather of a French version of that poem,—just as the "Knight's Tale" is an abstract of Boccaccio's *Teseide*. But there is all the difference in the manner of making an abstract. While Chaucer alters, invents, improves, and omits, showing at every touch the working of an independent judgment, Lydgate makes his digest of the *Thebais* in the spirit of a lawyer's clerk, depriving a poem, not very interesting in itself, of its life

[1] His own portion of this translation ends with the line—

Deth al consumyth, which may not be denied,

after which a new translator, Bennet Burgh, appears upon the scene with the announcement in the MS.: "Here dyed this translator and nobyl poete. And the yonge folwere gan his prologe on this wyse."

and character with such success, that his version of the "story" resembles his original in about the same degree as the chronicle of Eutropius resembles the history of Livy.

Lydgate's most agreeable poems are certainly those in which he speaks about himself. In his *Testament* and his *London Lackpenny* he has given us some suggestive glimpses of his life and character;[1] and he will sometimes rest in the midst of his translations, to relieve his weariness by a moment's gossip with the reader. These green oases are so welcome, in the midst of the desert of dulness surrounding them, that the traveller, refreshed by the little spring of garrulous doggerel, is inclined to celebrate it as a fountain of pure poetry. This however is mistaken gratitude.

What is really interesting and historically valuable in the art of Lydgate arises from his own incapacity as a poet. He is an exceedingly lame versifier.[2] Yet he was the poetical heir of Chaucer, who had left him an instrument admirably tuned for the purposes of metrical expression; and his failure to make use of this is only intelligible when we consider the external forces which were co-operating to alter the character of the language. Chaucer's system of versification, though perfectly scientific, was artificial, and necessarily provisional. Its leading principle was the adaptation of the grammatical forms, surviving in the Southern dialect of the English language, to the metrical forms used in the French language; in other words, Chaucer defined his verse not only by the number of accents, but by the number of syllables. This method was sound both theoretically and practically, and was made the easier both from the frequent naturalisation of French words in English, and from the fact that in both languages the final *e*, in a very large number of words, was still retained as the symbol of a more ancient form of inflection. It is plain, however,

[1] *Minor Poems* (Halliwell's edition), pp. 103, 232.

[2] It is fair to Lydgate to say that Gray's estimate of his merits is more favourable. The reader will find an admirable criticism on his works in Mathias' edition of Gray's Works, vol. ii. pp. 55-80. Gray has, however, modernised the text by the occasional insertion of syllables so as to make Lydgate's verse seem much smoother than it really is.

that there must have been difficulties in the deliberate application of a foreign metrical system to English, and Chaucer himself shows us that he was conscious of occasional failure. In his invocation to Apollo (imitated from Dante) at the opening of the third book of the *House of Fame*, he says :—

> But, for the rime is light and lewde,
> Yet make it somewhat agreable,
> *Though some verse fayle in a sillable*
> And that I do no diligence
> To shewe crafte but sentence.

He also speaks deprecatingly of his technical performance in his Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale," laying stress there, as in the passage just cited, on the predominant importance of the subject matter.[1] On the whole, however, Chaucer's experiment was eminently successful. He had an exquisite ear for rhythm, and his execution improved so much with practice that, in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, page after page may be read, on his own principle of scansion, without shock to the sense of harmony.

But his system was by no means easily intelligible to the mass of his countrymen. His own verses to his scrivener express at once his anxiety as to the orthography of the MS., so necessary for technical purposes, and his indignation at the copyist's want of intelligent appreciation.[2] When he died, though his successors continued to regard his verse with admiring envy, the secret of his harmonious composition seemed to have been buried with him, and the metrical system which he had so scientifically constructed fell rapidly into ruins.

[1] But Chaucer (though he can but lewedly
On metres and on riming craftily)
Hath sayd hem in swiche English as he can.
*Canterbury Tales*, 4467.

[2] Adam Scrivener, if ever it thee befall
Boece or Troilus for to write new,
Under thy long lockes thou maist have the scall,
But after my making thou write more trew,
So ofte a day I must thy worke renew,
It to correct and eke to rubbe and scrape,
And al is thorow thy negligence and rape.

It is true that some scholars, who have industriously analysed the verse of Lydgate, believe it to have been built on a regular principle, and maintain that the numerous metrical licenses it exhibits are the fruits of deliberate purpose. For my own part I believe that these can be explained in a much simpler manner. There can be no doubt that the English line of five accents, like the French verse of ten syllables, on which it is modelled, and like the Italian hendecasyllable, is ultimately derived from the Latin iambic senarius, curtailed of one of its feet in consequence of the necessities of rhyme.[1] The parent verse admits of no irregularity, and, in adapting the youthful European languages to the old standard, we may be fairly certain that the poets would have aimed at pruning away all roughness and excrescence. The late verse of Chaucer, at any rate, shows far fewer variations from the regularity of the normal type than the earlier verse. On the other hand, in Lydgate's ten-syllable verse, the number of irregularly constructed lines is very large. And though the deviations from the ideal standard can all be classified in distinct groups, the evidence seems to me to show that they are the natural effects of three causes,—a defective ear, ignorance of the grammatical principles on which Chaucer's metrical system was founded, and the gradual disappearance of the final *e*, representing the old inflections, before the tendencies to contraction prevailing in all oral language.

Lydgate's poems abound in confessions of his want of metrical skill, of which the following may be taken as an example :—

> And trouthe of metre I sette also a-syde,
> For of that art I hadde as tho no guyde
> Me to reduce, when I went a-wronge :
> I tooke none hede nouther of shorte nor longe.[2]

Nevertheless he imitated, as he best could, the scientifically constructed verse of Chaucer, and, if we may take his expressions literally, he would appear to have submitted

[1] See pp. 73-74.

[2] *Temple of Glass* (Schick), p. lvi.

his own compositions to the correction of the elder poet.[1] But he was well aware that he did not possess like Chaucer the advantage of a mastery over the Southern dialect, which was not only the depositary of the literary traditions of the English language, but also offered the closest analogies to the structure of the French. He asks his readers in one place to excuse his lack of art in consideration of his having been born at Lydgate; and in another place he expands this apology, ascribing his defects to his extraction from a part of England where the ancient language had been most corrupted by the mixture of foreign, in other words Scandinavian, elements.[2] While Lydgate therefore sought to carry on the literary tradition which Chaucer had established, and which he himself enthusiastically admired, he was conscious at once of lacking the scientific knowledge necessary for his purpose, and also of the overmastering influence of the common or vulgar speech, which pressed in on all sides upon the delicately organised and highly artificial system of metrical language bequeathed to him by his master. Hence his verse shows a constant tendency to break away from the normal iambic standard, and to revert to ruder rhythms, prevalent in the language before Chaucer introduced his improvements.

The normal standard of the measure, as Chaucer conceived it, is clearly a line of ten syllables with five accents falling on the even syllables, and with a cæsura or pause falling after any syllable between the third and the seventh. So long, however, as two strongly-accented syllables do not fall together, this movement of the verse may be varied by the substitution of a trochee for an iambus.[3] Now as the tradition of Anglo-Saxon rhythm

[1] And Chaucer now, alas, is not alyve
Me to reforme, or to be my rede,
For lacke of whom slower is my spede.
*Temple of Glass*, p. xci.

[2] I know myself most naked in all artes,
My comyn vulgar eeke moost interrupte;
And I conversaunte and borne in the partes
Where my natyfe language is mooste corrupte,
And with moost sondry tonges mixt and rupte.
Prologue to *Court of Sapience*.

[3] As in Pope's line—

Die of | a róse | in árlomátlic páin |.

was to measure solely by accent, it is natural to expect that when English poets, using the new metre without completely comprehending its character, departed from the iambic type, their variations would mainly affect the number of syllables in the line. And this is just what we find in practice. Chaucer's verse is sometimes redundant, sometimes defective in the number of syllables; though, as I have said, his aberrations from the fixed standard,—which by his own admission arise from his attention having been directed rather to matter than form,—are comparatively rare in his late work. Lydgate violates the law almost as frequently as he observes it. When his verse is redundant the excess generally occurs in the cæsura, as—

I fónd a wík|et | and éntrid ín as fást.
There saúgh I ál|so | the sórow ^of Pálamóun.
A mán to lóv|e | to hís confúsioún.
So mých of rés|on | was cómpast ín hir hért.
Yeve únto Vén|us, | and tó the déité.

When the verse is defective the syllable is wanting either in the first foot, as—

Únto hír and tó her éxcellénce.
Óf | musíke, ay díd his bísynés.
Hélp | of ríght in jói and nót in wó:

or in the foot following the cæsura, as—

That foúndid wás || ás | bi líklynésse.
For óf pité || pléin|li íf she félt.
And thérwithál || Vén|us ás me thoúght
Towárd this mán || fúl | benýgnelí.

Fore wéll thou wóst || yíf | I shál not feíne
Withoúte spéch thou máist no mérci háve:
For whó that wíl || óf | his préve peíne.
Conquérid wás || fírst | when ít was soúght.

Redundancy of syllable is easily explained by the character of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, which allowed the voice to *slur* the unimportant syllables between

the successive measures. Contrary as it is to the genius of the iambic movement, the license can hardly be reckoned —what some scholars have reckoned it—a beauty in verses meant to be read; and Chaucer, in his latest works, introduces it very sparingly, though, as was to be expected, it is common in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers, who composed their verse with a view to its being spoken. But, in the defective line, the mutilation of the first iambus, and the harsh collision of strongly accented syllables after the cæsura, can be ascribed to nothing but an imperfect ear or want of metrical skill. The blot, when it is found in Chaucer, doubtless proceeds from sense being attended to before sound; and Lydgate seems to think his master's occasional shortcomings in this respect a sufficient excuse for his own discords.[1] These, however, are so frequent as to indicate that he was unconscious of their presence, and his natural tendency to offend was aggravated by the irresistible movement of language itself. The Southern dialect, literary and artificial, remained fixed in the midst of the constant change that was proceeding in the spoken tongue, through loss of inflections and contractions of sound; so that, while the grammatical forms which it preserved were extremely convenient for poets employing the iambic rhythm, they by no means always corresponded with the actual pronunciation of words. Chaucer, writing in this dialect, which he understood scientifically, and adapting it to the laws of French prosody, with which he was also well acquainted, usually contrives to preserve a fairly strict conformity between grammar and metre. Lydgate, following in his steps, was often confused between the native tendencies of his Suffolk speech, the literary rules of the Southern dialect, and the requirements of a metre which he only imperfectly understood. A double usage, some-

[1] He writes as though Chaucer had looked over his own verses; but he is probably referring to Chaucer's habits of self-criticism:—

> My maister Chaucer, that founde many a spot,
> Hym liste not pinche, nor grucche at every blot,
> Nor meve hym silf to perturbe his reste,
> I have herd telle, but seide alweie the best.—*Troy Book.*

Quoted in Schick's edition of *Temple of Glass*, p. xcii.

times determined by the laws of grammar, sometimes by the customs of speech, is accordingly found in his verses, of which the following will serve as examples :—

| | |
|---|---|
| Grammatical form preserving the final *e* | In name of tho that trouth in lovë ment |
| Customary oral form suppressing the final *e* | Thurugh hevenli fire of love that is eterne<br>To help al tho that bië love so dere. |
| Grammatical form | In vertu oonli his youthë to cherice |
| Customary oral form | That were constrayned in hir tender youth(e)<br>And in childhode, as it is ofte couth(e). |
| Grammatical form | On which of you his trouthë first dothe breke |
| Customary oral form | Of trouth(e) to yow be bounde and undertake. |
| Grammatical form | Within the Estres, and gan awhilë tarie |
| Customary oral form | To love and servë, while that I have breath. |

The following couplet is peculiarly instructive :—

> Ful covertli to curen al hir smert,
> And shew the contrarie outward of her hert.

For in the first line we have in "curen" the old grammatical ending of the infinitive *en*, which is dropped in the second line in "shew"; and it also seems plain that in the rhyming words, which, grammatically written, would be "herte" and "smerte," the *e* has become mute. This constant instinct in Lydgate to suppress the inflecting *e* would naturally have made considerable havoc among the dissyllabic words available for the iambic movement; and, coupled with his bad ear and his Saxon tendency to measure the verse solely by the number of accents, and without reference to the number of the syllables, is, I think, sufficient to account for the numerous discords which prevail in his rhythm. He writes best in the royal or seven-lined stanza, where he is, so to speak, in stays. Here he occasionally produces a passage showing signs of art, especially when he presses his proverbs—of which he is fond and has a large supply—into the service of antithesis :—

> For white is whiter, if it be set by blak,
> And swete is swettir after bitternes,
> And falshode ever is drive and put a-bak

Where trouthe is roted withoute doubelnes ;
Withoute prefe may be no sikernes
Of love or hate ; and therefor of yow two
Shall love be more that it was bought with wo.[1]

When the stream of his verse is not kept within limits, his sentences are apt to trickle on aimlessly, and frequently lose themselves without ever finding a grammatical outlet. Feeble expletives and conventional phrases, of course, abound in him ; but the same defects are noticeable in Chaucer, and neither the one poet nor the other ought to be harshly blamed for yielding to the temptations incident to all youthful art.

Thomas Occleve, the only other considerable English poet in the first half of the fifteenth century, was born at Hockliffe in Bedfordshire in 1368 or 1369, and was therefore nearly of the same age as Lydgate.[2] Bred up for the priesthood,[3] it is probable that he may have taken some of the minor orders of the Church, but, altering his course for some reason, he entered the office of the Privy Seal at the early age of nineteen. This department of the State stood midway between the King's Signets and the Great Seal, taking warrants from the former and delivering them to the latter for the payment of all grants and the issue of patents. The work, which consisted mainly of copying, was naturally performed exclusively by men who had received an ecclesiastical education, and it brought Occleve into contact with many persons of importance who were engaged in the business of the State. After twelve years' service he was granted an annuity of £10, which was paid him till 1409, when it was changed to one of £13 : 6 : 8. This he continued to receive with more or less regularity till 1425, after which year he

[1] *Temple of Glass*, 1250.

[2] In his *Dialog* written in 1421 or 1422, he says :—

Of age am I fifty winter and thre.

His name also appears to have been written "Hoccleve." Full particulars about his life may be found in Mr. Furnivall's careful and exhaustive edition of his Minor Poems, published by the Early English Text Society.

[3] I whilom thought
Have ben a priest ; now past is the raas.
Occleve, *De Regimine Principum*.

was pensioned off with a grant for life on the Priory of Southwick. The date of his death is uncertain, but from one of his surviving poems it appears that he was still alive in 1448.[1]

The motives of Occleve's compositions are of various kinds. Discovering, perhaps in the intervals of his civil employment, that he had a turn for versification, he seems to have sought instruction in the art from Chaucer, who in his declining years would always have been readily found in the house which he occupied at Westminster. He felt the influence of the feudal reaction in the early years of the fifteenth century, and translated, or rather adapted without acknowledgment in his *Epistle to Cupid*, Christine de Pisan's *L'Epître au Dieu d'Amours*, a performance which, oddly enough, appears to have been regarded by the sensitive feminine critics of the day as a reflection on their sex.

He also shared with more than ordinary fervour in the orthodox reaction against the doctrines of Wycliffe. In two poems addressed to Henry V. soon after his accession he congratulates the country on being under a genuinely Catholic monarch, and he appeals to the Knights of the Garter to be instant in the slaying of heretics.[2] Another poem, full of invective and bitterness, is dedicated to Sir John Oldcastle, the famous Lollard, whom he exhorts to recant his errors, and to furnish loyal assistance to the king in his French expedition.[3] Four or five compositions in honour of the Virgin Mary show the enthusiasm with which he committed himself to the main current of feeling then shaping the course of Catholic devotion.[4]

But Occleve's most characteristic poems are, as is also the case with Lydgate, those which take the form of autobiography. He possessed a certain vein of original humour, and probably found his account in amusing the men of position, on whom he depended, by verses written in the character of half-moralist, half-buffoon, burlesquing

[1] *Balade to my Gracious Lord of York* (Furnivall, p. 49).
[2] Hoccleve's Works (Furnivall, i. 39, 41).
[3] *Ibid.* 8.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 43, 52, 67.

his own character, and describing the manners of the time. In his *Male Regle*, composed in 1406, he has left a rather minute and disparaging portrait of himself in his capacity of Civil Servant. By no means zealous in the discharge of his official duties, he represents himself—as Lydgate paints his own life in the monastery—spending whatever of his time and substance he could on good wine and festive company. He rose, he says, like his fellow-clerks at nine o'clock in the morning, and proceeded to his work by water from Chester Inn (near Somerset House) to Westminster. This habit of his furnished him with a text for solemn moralising, for he confesses it to have been the effect of pure vanity, which made him unable to resist the solicitations of the boatmen, who called him "Mister," and so obtained his custom.[1] Vanity again, quite as much as inclination, attracted him to taverns, where he spent much of the time that was due to his public work.[2] He begs his readers to take warning by his sad experience, and to consult the *Book of Nature of Beasts*, wherein they may see how mermaids entice shipmen, a fact of natural history which he illustrates by the respectable example of Ulysses and the Sirens. One advantage, however, he tells them, with the humour peculiar to him, he possessed in the midst of his dissipation :—

> Oon avantage in this cas I have,
> I was so ferd with any man to fighte,
> Cloos kepte I me; no man durste I deprave

---

[1] Other than "maister" called was I nevere
Among this meynee, in myn audience;
Methoghte I was y-maad a man for evere,
So tikeled me that nyce reverence,
That it me madë larger of despense
Than that I thoght have ben. O flaterie!
The guyse of thy traiterous diligence
Is folk to mescheef haasten and to hie.

[2] Wher was a gretter mayster eke than y?
Or bet aqwentyd at Westmynster Yate,
Among the tavernerës namëly
And cookes when I cam erly or late?
I pynchid nat at hem in myn acate (buying),
But paied hem as that they axe wolde,
Wherefor I was the welcomer algate
And for a verray gentil man y-holde.

> But rouningly; I spak no thyng on highte,
> And yet my wil was good if that I mighte
> For lettynge of my manly cowardyse,
> That ay of strookes impressid the wighte
> So that I durste medlen in no wyse.[1]

It is probable that the popularity of *La Male Regle*, arising out of its quaint and novel vein of personal humour, encouraged the author to make fresh attempts in the same style. The collection of his poems at any rate contains several burlesque appeals—all partaking more or less of the nature of Odes to Impecuniosity—to different patrons for dinners, presents of money, or the payment of arrears of salary. Personal experience also furnishes the basis of the Prologue to his *De Regimine Principum*, a poem written for the edification of Henry V. before his accession to the throne, wherein an old beggar is made to perform for Occleve those offices of father confessor, which Genius performs for Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*.

The poems in which this autobiographical motive is most strongly developed are his *Complaint* and *Dialogue* written in 1421. In 1416 he was unhappy enough to lose his senses for a time; and these compositions describe, with touches of real pathos, and of that nature which never loses its interest, his sorrows and anxieties after his recovery. In the former, he relates how his old friends, when they met him in the street, turned their heads another way; and how he overheard what people said about him. Some declared his malady would return: when he heard them speak like this his face would glow with trouble and fear. Others said that he looked like "a wild steer," or noticed that, when he talked to them, his feet were always "waving to and fro," and that his eyes constantly wandered. Then he would go home and look in the glass, endeavouring to form a judgment about himself. Comforted for a moment, he would reflect that "men in

[1] I was so much afraid of fighting with any man that I kept to myself; I durst disparage no man except in a whisper; I spoke nothing out loud; and yet I had will enough to do so if my natural cowardice had not prevented me, which impressed me so much with the fear of blows that I durst not in any wise meddle.

their own case ben blind all day"; he would therefore resolve to suffer in silence and was even afraid to show himself out of doors. All this he writes in his *Complaint*. He has scarcely finished it when a friend looks in to whom he reads his composition. A *Dialogue* follows, in which the friend earnestly dissuades him from publishing it, arguing that people will have forgotten all about his illness, and that the *Complaint* will only bring it back to their recollection; moreover, if he begins to write again, his malady will certainly return. To all this Occleve turns a deaf ear, declaring his intention of publishing his *Confessions*, and of translating a Latin treatise, called *Scito Mori*. Seeing him resolved, his friend goes upon a fresh tack, and bids him, in God's name, write and publish what he will. On the poet asking him to suggest a subject, the other advises him to write a story in honour of Woman, to make amends for his *Epistle to Cupid*, which, however unreasonably, had given offence to the sex. Occleve assenting writes the story of *Jereslaus' Wife*, the original of which he found in the *Gesta Romanorum;* and to this he adds his translation of the *Scito Mori*, and (at the request of his friend) another tale, *Jonathas and Fellicula*, also taken from the *Gesta*.

He thus obtains, after the example of Chaucer and Gower, a framework for his little group of stories and moralisations. Poor as his scheme is, and unworthy to be mentioned with the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, it is not altogether wanting in a vein of original invention, which, so far, raises it above the lifeless allegorical machinery of the *Confessio Amantis*. Through the crude and inartistic conception we can discern gleams of the dramatic spirit which gives animation to Pope's unrivalled *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Generally speaking, Occleve may be described as an amiable and garrulous poet, qualified to discharge the functions of the trouvère, in so far as these consisted in stooping to amuse the great at the poet's own expense; and possessing powers of versification just sufficient to obtain him distinction and patronage, because he was fortunate enough to live in an age when those who could write the

English language were few, and those who were anxious to read it were many and liberal.

Occleve avows that he learned the art of writing in metre from Chaucer, whom he regarded with infinite admiration as the glory of the new English tongue.[1] He claims to have known the great poet better than any man, and implies that the latter did what he could to improve his verses.[2]

It is indeed evident that, like Lydgate, Occleve found as much difficulty in composing in the new English, as if it had been a foreign tongue; and he too is full of apologies to his patrons for the rudeness of his performance.[3] He learned from his master to avoid those harsh collisions of accent which make the verses of Lydgate so unmusical; but, though his lines generally contain the correct number of syllables, this success is obtained at the expense of the accent, which is constantly thrown on weak places. In the first fifteen stanzas of *The Complaynte of the Virgin Mary* the following examples of this defect occur:—

> And the tetés that gaf to sowken eek
> The Sone of God which ón hy hangith heer.
>
> And seint Anné, my modir dere also.
>
> Eek thee to sowke on my briestés gaf I,
> Thee norisshyng fairé and tendrely.
>
> And maketh á wrongfúl disseverance.

---

[1] But weylaway! so is myn herte wo,
That the honour of Englyssh tonge is dede,
Of which I wont was han conseil and rede.
*De Regimine Principum*, st. 280.

[2] My dere maistir—God his soule quyte!—
And fadir Chaucer fayn wolde have me taught,
But I was dul, and lerned lite or naught.
*Ibid.* 297.

[3] For Lydgate see p. 327, note 2. Occleve, writing to the Duke of Bedford (*Works*, Furnivall, p. 57), says:—

> I drede lest that my maister Massy,
> That is of fructuous intelligence,
> Whan he beholdeth how unconningly
> My boke is metrid, how raw my sentence,
> How feeble eek been my colours, his prudence
> Shall son encombrid been of my folie.

That alle folk see ánd beholde it may.

As thow were an evíl and wikked wight.

Thy name Pilat háth put in Scripture.

Sone, if thou haddest á fadír lyvynge.

That is to say, taking this poem as an average specimen, the number of lines in Occleve's poems, in which the accent falls on a weak syllable, would amount to about ten per cent. In his use of metres he follows Chaucer, but confines himself almost exclusively to two measures, namely that which was afterwards called the royal stanza, consisting of seven lines of five accents each, with the rhymes disposed as follows, *a b a b b c c*; and the stanza of eight lines with the following disposition of rhymes, *a b a b b c b c*. The only feature of originality he shows is in his use of dialogue in the royal stanza, and it is interesting to observe the manner in which so early a writer meets the difficulties attendant on this mode of composition. On the whole, his style exhibits a good deal of dramatic energy and vivacity, as may be judged from the following stanzas, in which his friend is remonstrating with him against publishing his *Complainte*:—

"That I shall saye shal be of gode entente:
Hast thow mayde this compleynte foorth to goo
Among the peple?" "Ye, frend, so I mente;
What els?" "Nay, Thomas, ware, do not soo!
Yf thow be wyse of that matter hoo,
Reherse thow it not, ne it wake;
Kepe all that cloos for thyn honour's sake.

"How it stood with thee, layde is all aslepe,[1]
Men have forgete it; it is out of mynd.
That thou towche thereof I not me kepe;[2]
Let be; that rede I, for I canot find
O[3] man to speke of it; in as good a kynde
As thow hast stode among them on this day
Standyst thow now."[4] "A nay," quod I, "nay, nay."

[1] It is all laid to sleep how it stood with thee.
[2] I would not have thee touch on it.
[3] One.
[4] Thou standest now in as good a position as thou hast stood among men before this day.

It will be observed that, like Gower, when he is writing in dialogue, Occleve naturally runs into inversions. In the foregoing passage he does so, plainly, from the difficulty of preserving the natural order of the sentences in rhyme; that is to say, he fixes his rhymes before he forms his sentence. Nevertheless it is to be remembered, as has been remarked before, that the Anglo-Saxon syntax favoured this manner of writing, which Occleve sometimes employs when there is no necessity for him to do so. For example, he writes: "A riotous person I was and forsake";[1] a line which would certainly have run better if the words had followed the order of the thought: "I was a riotous person and forsake"; "If that a leche curyd had me so";[2] when it was evidently open to him to write "me had curyd."

In a word, the syntax of Occleve, as well as the prosody of Lydgate, shows the tendency of the native Anglo-Saxon element to revolt against those foreign laws of grammar and harmony, which had been imposed on the English language by the cultivated genius of Chaucer.

[1] *Complaint*, 67. [2] *Dialog*, 85.

## NOTE ON "SPECULUM MEDITANTIS"

Since the publication of the first edition of this volume in 1895 the ingenuity and research of Mr. G. C. Macaulay of Trinity College, Cambridge, has discovered that, though Gower's work is no longer to be found with the above title, the poem itself actually exists under the name *Mirour de l'Omme*. It consists of about 29,000 lines of octosyllabic *French* verse in twelve-line stanzas, and is a religious allegory on the warfare of the Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins, with their progeny, against the Soul of Man, and the defence made by the seven opposing Virtues. With this is combined a satire on the various ranks of society as existing in the poet's own day, concluding with a life of the Virgin and an appeal to her for assistance. See Mr. Macaulay's edition of Gower published by the Clarendon Press in 1899-1902.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PROGRESS OF ALLEGORY IN ENGLISH POETRY

ALLEGORY in the literature of the Middle Ages presents itself under three aspects: (1) As a philosophical method of interpreting the phenomena of nature; (2) As the abstracting process of the mind which embodies itself in the rhetorical figure of Personification; (3) As a specific form of poetry.

1. The allegorical method of interpretation is duly explained by Dante in his epistle to Can Grande conveying the dedication of the *Divine Comedy*. It need hardly be said that it is employed continuously through that poem, but there is a special reference to it in a speech of Beatrice, touching the abode of souls in the planets:—

"They show themselves here," says his guide to the poet, "not because it is their allotted sphere, but to give a sign that they have mounted less high in the degrees of celestial life. One must speak thus to your wit, since it is only from an object of sense that it apprehends what it afterwards makes fit matter for the understanding. Hence Scripture condescends to your faculty, and attributes to God feet and hands, while it understands thereby something different; and Holy Church represents to you in the likeness of men Gabriel and Michael and that other who made Tobias whole again."[1]

2. From the method of abstraction, illustrated in these lines, springs naturally that multitude of allegorical

[1] *Paradiso*, iv. 37-48.

personages which fills the poetry of the Middle Ages: Righteousness and Peace; Lady Mede and Conscience; the Seven Deadly Sins; the Cardinal and Theological Virtues; and most prominently of all, Love, whether in the semi-religious form he assumes in the *Vita Nuova*, or with the semi-pagan attributes assigned to him in the *Romance of the Rose*.

3. As the mental habit of interpreting nature allegorically encouraged the use of the figure of impersonation, so the latter led the way to a new mode of composition, in which abstract characters were presented together in a regular form of action, epic or dramatic. The *Romance of the Rose*, *Le Château d'Amour*, the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, Mysteries and Moralities without number, indicate the tenacious hold which this form of poetry took upon the mediæval imagination. So strongly indeed did it root itself in the thought of those ages that, even in the sixteenth century, when the genuine fountains of allegorical imagination had run dry, the surviving traditions of criticism still required the application of the principle to poems which owed their existence to quite other motives. In his correspondence with the Cardinal Scipio Gonzaga, Tasso not only feigns that his *Jerusalem Delivered* contains a hidden meaning, but expresses his astonishment that Aristotle should have made no mention of allegory as a distinct form of poetry.[1] Had the poet lived in an age which could have enabled him to observe the changes of art and taste in historical perspective, he must have seen that the growth of allegorical composition was the result of a long series of causes, which had scarcely begun to operate on the human imagination when Aristotle wrote his treatise on poetry.

The first definite mention of allegory in Greek literature occurs in Plato's *Phædrus*, where Socrates, having made a passing reference to the rationalistic explanations, offered in his time, of the myth of Boreas and Orithyia, proceeds to say:—

"Now I quite acknowledge that these explanations are

[1] Letter of 15th June 1575.

very nice, but he is not to be envied who has to give them; much labour and ingenuity will be required of him; and when he has once begun he must go on and rehabilitate Centaurs and Chimæras dire. Gorgons and winged steeds flow in upon him apace, and numberless other inconceivable monstrosities and marvels of nature. And if he is sceptical about this, and would fain reduce them all to the rules of probability, this sort of crude philosophy will take up all his time."[1]

Hence it appears that Plato affected to ridicule the attempts, made by Euhemerus and others, to furnish some sort of scientific substitute for the polytheistic interpretation of nature, which thinking Greeks were no longer able to accept. He himself, on the contrary, while setting aside the established beliefs of his countrymen in favour of his own methods of philosophical abstraction, made, as everybody knows, the most ample use of the primitive myth-making faculty for his special purposes. Holding that his invisible world of Ideas was the real source of things, and that it was possible to mount, by a course of dialectic, through successive stages of abstraction, into the presence of the Idea which was the parent of all the rest, he by no means disdained fable and poetical imagery as aids to the mind in its difficult journey. Illustration of metaphysical conceptions by means of poetical fictions became therefore an almost essential part of his philosophical method; and this was the first stage in the history of allegory.

The second stage was reached when Greeks and Jews met in Alexandria, and Philo Judæus (B.C. 20) applied the principles of Plato's philosophy to the interpretation of Hebrew theology. By this system a hidden philosophical meaning was extracted from the literal text of the Scriptures. For example, Philo puts the following interpretation on the story of Sarah and Hagar: "Sarah, who represents devotion, gives birth to Virtue; Hagar, who indicates learning, gives birth to the sophist. If Learning will not serve Virtue, what says the Scripture?

[1] Plato, *Phædrus* (Jowett's translation), vol. i. p. 564 (1881).

'Cast forth the handmaiden and her son.'"[1] The Scriptural account of the Fall is thus explained: "Eve is concupiscence connected with the heart of Adam, that is, the mind of man considered as balanced between good and evil. The serpent is sensual pleasure, by means of which concupiscence leads the mind of man to indulgence in gratifications unworthy of his spirit; and in this consists the fall and its consequences, the birth of Cain—that is, of proud, sinful, and foolish opinion among men."[2]

The Platonic spirit of allegory also took possession of the critics of Greek poetry; and the allegorical interpretation of the Jewish Scripture finds a parallel in the method applied by Porphyry (A.D. 233), one of Philo's intellectual descendants, to the poems of Homer. The moralisation of the Greek poet's polytheism produced results not less grotesque than the theological explanations appended to the popular mediæval tales collected in the *Gesta Romanorum*. Among other interpretations, the Grotto of the Nymphs, in the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey*, was explained as an allegory of the world, the water nymphs themselves being human souls, waiting in their cave till the time came for their union with the bodies which they were predestined to inhabit.[3]

Jew and Greek having thus accepted allegory as the key of their respective religious traditions, it only remained to carry the process one stage farther; and this was done when Origen (A.D. 185), himself the pupil of the Neo-Platonist Ammonius, applied the system of his master's philosophy to illustrate the dogmas of the Christian faith. No man employed more perseveringly than Origen the principle of allegorical interpretation. He taught that as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so too does the Holy Scripture, which has been granted by divine benevolence for the salvation of man. The simple may be edified by the body (*σῶμα*); the more advanced by the soul (*ψυχή*); and the perfect by the spirit (*πνεῦμα*). Corresponding with this triple division there was a threefold sense in the

[1] Donaldson, *Literature of Ancient Greece*, ii. 175.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 176. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 201.

Bible: the carnal or purely historical; the psychical or moral; the spiritual or speculative.[1] This method of interpretation, adopted by the Church, was applied by Gregory the Great in his Commentary on the Book of Job, and as the writings of that illustrious Pope formed part of the standard literature of mediæval education, the use of allegory gradually produced a kind of intellectual atmosphere, necessary to the life of the Middle Ages, and the parent source of such works as the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*.

The influence of Plato's philosophy was equally potent in multiplying the rhetorical figure of Personification, which furnishes the "machinery" for allegorical poetry. Inevitably, though perhaps unconsciously, Plato himself yielded to the inclination to personify his Ideas. The first to explore the vast and unknown world of Abstraction, he took delight in providing his disciples with chart and compass to follow him in his difficult navigation. By degrees Magian elements crept into his system, and the first cause of the universe was connected with the world of sense by means of a graduated scale of spiritual agencies. This tendency in the Platonic philosophy was greatly promoted by the genius of the Romans for abstraction; and when the Greek encyclopædic system of education was established through the breadth of the Roman Empire, the Latin language had become a suitable instrument for the propagation of the allegorical style.[2]

Prominent among the abstract persons of Latin poetry was the figure of Love, Amor, or Cupido. The comparatively insignificant son of Aphrodite seems to have gradually absorbed the attributes of the great primal Eros of the Hesiodic theogony.[3] His divine supremacy, how-

[1] Donaldson, *Literature of Ancient Greece*, ii. 326-7.

[2] For examples of the Latin love of Abstraction, take the great group of allegorical personages whom Virgil (*Æn.* vi. 273) places at the entrance of hell, and such a stanza as this of Horace (*Odes*, i. 24. 5):—

> Ergo Quintilium perpetuus Sopor
> Urget? cui Pudor et Justitiæ Soror,
> Incorrupta Fides, nudaque Veritas
> Quando ullum inveniet parem?

[3] Compare Sophocles, *Antigone*, 781; Aristophanes, *Aves*, 606; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulide*, 548.

ever, was only established after Plato had discovered the analogy between physical passion and intellectual aspiration, and had made use of Eros as a symbol of the dialectical process, by which the mind, in its pursuit of the highest forms of beauty, mounts from the perceptions of sense to the conception of universal ideas. Love became at once the lord of the world of Abstraction, and the pilot of the mind in its voyage through the great ocean which lay between it and the First Cause of its being. In time the Neo-Platonic system was blended with Christian theology; the map of the Spiritual Ocean was gradually defined; and the vague outlines of the old Ideas were filled in with the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite. Succeeding ages made constant use of the new knowledge, and when St. Bonaventura wrote his *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, the stages of the journey had been so accurately determined, that Dante was able, in the next generation, to report to the world his own experiences of the region, by the aid of poetical images and the light of scholastic science.

In spite of this systematic development, the ancient world was remarkably slow in adapting allegory to the art of poetry. Pagan moralist and Christian theologian probably both felt that the intellectual instrument for interpreting the highest truth ought not to be too readily adapted to the purposes of amusement; so that, with the exception of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, all the principal allegorical compositions of the old world are written in prose, and are the work of philosophers. The two great examples of allegorical fiction, which may be said to close the period commencing with Plato's myths, are *Amor and Psyche* in the Tales of Apuleius, and the *Marriage of Mercury with Philology* by Martianus Capella. To these may be added a composition of another kind, Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, which is only of the nature of fiction, in so far as the conduct of the narrative depends on the introduction of the allegorical figure of Philosophy.

It is a significant fact that (if we except the *Poem on Boethius*) the first appearance of allegory in mediæval

poetry, composed in the vulgar tongue, is plainly quite independent, in its motive, either of the *Psychomachia*, or of any of the existing models of the style in prose. The whole treatment of the subject of Love by the troubadours is allegorical; moreover, in their poetry the person of Love himself is sometimes described by his symbolical attributes after the manner illustrated in the following passage:—

> So fine his form 'tis hid from mortal sight,
> So swift his foot that flight is all in vain;
> His dart of steel inflicts a bitter pain,
> A cureless wound, yet mingled with delight;
> No hauberk forged but through each plate and chain
> His straight-directed barb will pierce outright;
> The shafts he shoots have first a golden head,
> But at the last his arrows are of lead.[1]

In this imagery, and in the refined analysis of love in the Provençal lyrics, there appears a close analogy to the description of the characteristics of physical love in the *Symposium*. Was the resemblance merely accidental? It is, I think, hardly possible to conceive that poets of Teutonic descent would have invented their conceited and metaphysical style without some literary model; and it is certain that no model of the kind was offered in the Latin poetry, Christian or pagan, of the decadence. On the whole it seems to me most probable that the connecting channel of thought is to be found in the poetry of Ovid, who naturalised in Latin many of the metaphysical conceits of Alexandrian literature; and that Ovid's vein of amorous sentiment was refined and idealised into a new style by the invention of the troubadours, who were also influenced by the love poetry of the Arabs.[2]

[1] Translated from Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. iii. p. 391:—

> Tant es sotill c'om no la por verar,
> E cor tan tost que res no ill pot fugir,
> E fier tant fort c'om ges non pot guerir
> Ab dart d'assier don fai colp da plazar,
> E no ill ten pro ausberce forbe ni espes,
> Si lansa dreit; e pueis trag demanes
> Sagetas d'aur al son arc asteiat,
> Pueis lansa un dart de plom gent afilat.

[2] I have traced the imagery of Love's gold and lead darts as far back as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, i. 468. With the addition of the steel dart

At the same time, it must be remembered that the vein of Platonic sentiment in the lyrics of the troubadours would never have been so dominant, if it had been derived from a merely literary source, and had not been rather encouraged and developed by certain social conditions, bearing an obvious, though accidental, affinity to points in the Platonic system of philosophy. These conditions were provided by the atmosphere of feudalism and chivalry. In the first place, there was a striking analogy between the Teutonic reverence for women and the Greek worship of physical beauty, on which Plato based his system of dialectic. In the second place, the worship of the Virgin afforded a channel into which this instinct of the German race poured all its tide of devotional feeling; and the mind of many a Christian votary mounted towards heaven precisely in the same manner as Plato's disciples learned to ascend from the admiration of beautiful objects of sense to the contemplation of the heavenly beauty. In the third place, the separation of the feudal aristocracy in Court and Castle favoured, as we have already seen, the formation of a code of conduct and language peculiar to a caste, and not unlike that esoteric form of doctrine which Plato is supposed to have communicated to his more advanced disciples. The book of André le Chapelain on Love corresponds, in its own way, with those mysterious

this imagery is constantly repeated in allegorical poetry through the Middle Ages, and symbolises gladness, sadness, and death. The author of the *Court of Love* speaks of the two darts described by Ovid—

> The Golden Love and Leden Love they hight:
> The tone was sad, the tother glad and light.

And Barnfield, in his *Tears of an Affectionate Shepherd*, alludes to Death's black shaft of steel, and Love's yellow one of gold. Dr. W. G. Rutherford points out to me that the germ of the idea appears in Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulide*, 549—

> δίδυμ' Ἔρως ὁ χρυσοκόμας
> τόξ' ἐντείνεται χαρίτων,
> τὸ μὲν ἐπ' εὐλωνι πότμῳ,
> τὸ δ' ἐπὶ συγχύσει βιοτᾶς.

The double set of bow and arrows and their twofold effect having been once imagined, some Alexandrian poet may have developed the image of the golden and leaden arrows, which was afterwards still further expanded in the Middle Ages. See further as to the character of Love himself, p. 353, note 1.

revelations on the same subject, which Socrates in the *Symposium* declares that he received from Diotima.[1]

While this vein of mystical sentiment prevailed in the Castle, the old methods of Scriptural interpretation were steadily pursued in the Schools; so that from the eleventh century onwards a vast quantity of allegorical thought was available for poetical purposes. Under such circumstances numerous forms of allegorical composition sprang into existence, but, as the different varieties grouped themselves round two main motives, one chivalrous and the other scholastic, they can be easily classified, and in such a manner as to illustrate the opposite intellectual influences that modified thought under the Feudal and Ecclesiastical Systems in England up to the time of the Reformation. I shall endeavour in this chapter to give some account of the chief English allegorical poems comprehended in these two groups, pointing out their special characteristics, and the different external movements that affected the literary style.

Two of the earliest allegorical poems composed in England belong to the monastic or scholastic group, and are evidently the product of the Saxon element in the national imagination. Of one of these I have already spoken at length. The view of man and nature which characterises the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* is based on the traditional teaching preserved unchanged for generations in the Christian schools. But the manner in which the doctrine is conceived and applied is Langland's own. The energy of individual conviction which animates his satire gives his poem a unique place in the somewhat lifeless history of English allegory, and inspires his abstract personages with a dramatic and human interest of which there is no other example till we meet with the characters of the *Pilgrim's Progress.*

Very different is the character of *The Pearl*, a poem that may have been written a little earlier or a little later in the fourteenth century than the *Vision of Piers the Plowman.* The author, whoever he was, was of the

[1] Plato, *Symposium*, 201.

school of poets who sought to combine the surviving traditions of Saxon minstrelsy with the new fashions of French verse. He employs the West Midland or Mercian dialect, and composes in stanzas of twelve lines of four accents, the lines being connected by a recurrence of two alternate rhymes up to the eighth verse, and being also alliterative. The last four verses of each stanza introduce a fresh series of rhymes, and the stanzas are closed by a species of refrain or burden after the manner of the French ballad. In this respect the poem shows the influence of Norman models; but the spirit that it breathes is that of the Saxon monastery, and the half-forgotten literary tradition of Saxon poetry. A praiseworthy enthusiasm for ancient relics of the language has perhaps exaggerated the poetical merits of *The Pearl*.[1] The motives of the composition appear to me to be mainly conventional. Nothing can be more simple than the story. The poet tells us that he lost in an arbour a pearl of exceeding price: he fell asleep and was transported into the celestial regions, where he beheld a fair maiden sitting adorned with pearls, whom he recognised as the jewel he had lost. She showed him the city of the heavenly Jerusalem, and then passed away from him over a river, which having vainly attempted to cross, he afterwards found himself banished from Paradise. Many of the ideas thus expressed—the dream, the *Itinerarium Mentis*, the apocalyptic vision—are the common heirlooms of Platonic allegory; others, such as the introduction of homilies and the rendering of Biblical passages into poetic diction, recall the literary methods of Cynewulf in every point except the phraseology of the minstrel.

It is of course possible that *The Pearl* may embody the feelings of one who had suffered an actual bereavement; but, if so, the poet either wished to leave no trace of himself in his allegory, or, what is more probable, did not know how to reach the heart by those exquisite personal touches that lend such pathos to the parallel situation in

[1] See the edition published by Mr. Israel Gollancz, 1891, Introductory Remarks.

Dante's *Vita Nuova.* Nor does the allegory itself appear to be very happily conceived: no great powers of invention are required to feign that one has lost a pearl, and afterwards to indicate that what has been really lost is a daughter or a sister. Like all the compositions of the school of Cynewulf the poem shows a passion for riddles and conceits. Its chief merits are a very charming style of ideal landscape-painting and a facility of versification, but in the latter respect the writer seems to have had no suspicion of the latent harmonies afterwards evoked from the language by Chaucer; while his archaic methods of metrical diction must exclude him from the list of those who can in any intelligible sense be styled *English* poets.

*The Pearl* and the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* exemplify the two opposite modes in which the monastic form of allegory can be used as an instrument of religious thought. In the former, allegory is made the vehicle of contemplation; the soul mounts in the Platonic fashion, by means of a vague symbolism, into the ideal world, where it moves in ecstasy through a supernatural atmosphere, in which spiritual things are dimly expressed under figure of sensible objects. Abstract personages are entirely absent in this poem just as in the vision of Dante. They abound, on the contrary, in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman,* where the poet's aim is to contrast the high ideal of Christian practice, as set forth by the Church, with the vices of the actual world. But, in obedience to the didactic instinct of the satirist, Langland's personages almost completely divest themselves of their abstract character; and Gluttony or Avarice appears before us as the living portrait of the toper or the miser, as he might have been met with at any time in the London streets. Both allegories express religious tendencies in the Saxon mind; in the one case, the mysticism that prompts it to take refuge in the cloister; in the other, the active conscience that bids it preach to the people.

The chivalrous form of allegory, which clearly derives its origin from the Norman element in the nation, lies between these two extreme points, and reflects the manners,

thoughts, and sentiments of the ruling classes of society under the Feudal System. Introduced by Chaucer from the Continent, it was developed by Lydgate and carried by James I., after his release from captivity, into Scotland, where it helped to form a new school of allegory represented by Dunbar and Gavin Douglas; it survived, in the scholastic form developed by Hawes, and in the debased style of Skelton, up to the very eve of the Reformation. It furnishes, therefore, a mirror of social thought and manners during a very considerable period in the history of England. Based as it was, however, on a kind of Freemasonry, in a society of which the framework has long since disappeared, it is exceedingly difficult for the modern reader, without a strong effort of imagination, to realise its spirit and meaning. I propose, accordingly, before considering the merits of some of the characteristic poems of the class, to examine that fundamental view of Nature which, in the Middle Ages, was indicated by the name of Love.

We are, in the first place, to imagine a great world of abstraction, inhabited by all the invisible forces and principles which influence human life, and which are always coming into contact with each other in personified forms after the manner of men and women.[1] The system of this invisible world is bound together by the chain of Love, which therefore, in one sense, is to be regarded as the principle of life.[2] Love, however, is not only a spiritual principle, but a person, the sovereign, together with his mother Venus, of the unseen world and of the abstract beings

[1] In illustration of this point the reader may consult the opening of the *Parlement of Foules* with the description of Scipio's Dream, and especially the first stanza—

> The lyfe so short, the craft so long to lerne,
> Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquering,
> The dredful joy always that flit so yerne,
> All this mean I by Love, etc.

[2] This idea is borrowed from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, and is expressed by Chaucer in the "Knight's Tale" (2987-93):—

> The firste mover of the cause above,
> Whan he firste made the fayre chaine of love,
> Gret was th' effect and high was his entente,
> Wel wist he why and what thereof he ment,
> For with that fayre chaine of love he bond
> The fire, the air, the water, and the lond,
> In certain bondis that they may not flee.

who dwell in it. As represented in mediæval allegory, he is all-powerful, arbitrary, merciless, and capricious, and his character appears to be derived, in part from an inherited tradition of Plato's Eros painted in the *Symposium*, but to a greater extent from the Cupido of Ovid's *Amores*, poems with which the readers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were very familiar.[1] Venus, on the other hand, perhaps on account of her sex, is represented as more tender and compassionate; and she not infrequently heals the wounds which her son has inflicted, and advances the interests of lovers who invoke her mediation. Besides the supreme rulers of the region, the world of Love is haunted by terrible powers,—corresponding to the evil genii of Magian legend,—Malebouche, Envy, Despair, Poverty, and the like—all of whom endanger the well-being of lovers. For mortals have free access to this ideal country—sometimes localised in Citheron—but they approach it at their peril; since, if uninitiated, they are liable to be called to account by the god himself, while they are at all times exposed to malicious treatment at the hands of ill-disposed spirits. The scene of their adventures in the ideal world is usually a garden, a park, a temple, a palace, or a castle, into one of which they are introduced while in a dream, and from which they return to the world of sense, being roused from slumber by the sound of a bell, a horn, or some other kind of material alarum.

Life in the kingdom of Love is spent under the most agitating conditions. Sometimes it is regarded as a field of battle: the lover and the lady are enemies, and the former is exposed to terrible wounds from the looks and words of his antagonist: or the heart of the loved one, like a rebellious vassal, is beleaguered in its castle by Love and all his barons. When in a state of peace, the realm is governed by the ordinances of the presiding deities, and these are of such binding force, that the breach of any one of them renders the lover subject to extreme penalties. But, as the law of love is of the most intricate and difficult nature, it requires scientific study;

[1] Ovid, *Amores*, ii. 9.

and in this department of their theme the chivalrous school of allegory lighted upon an inexhaustible mine of symbolism. They found that Love resembled a process at law, and more particularly the practice of the *Cours d'Amour*, as actually constituted. Neither Venus nor her son could have been better versed in the metaphysics of the law of Love than the Countess of Champagne and the other presidents of those tribunals; nor would it have been possible for masculine poets to compete with the female lawyers and schoolmen in the profound analysis applied to each case brought before the courts.[1] But the institutions themselves provided the troubadours with a store of images and sentiments, ready prepared for allegorical composition. Love became the president of a court; the court required to be regulated by statutes; and the statutes had to be interpreted by reference to all that Ovid and other poetical authorities had said upon the point raised. All the precedents bearing on the subject were carefully collected from Greek mythology and formally cited; the lovers came before the court or parliament, bringing with them "bills," "complaints," or "petitions"; the parties to the suit must be admonished and instructed by the judge; and, lastly, offenders against the statutes were ordered to make atonement for their transgressions. In one or other of these various aspects of Love is presented every example in French or English poetry of the chivalrous allegory which derives its origin from the *Romance of the Rose*.

It has been already said that Chaucer was the first of our poets to naturalise the chivalrous allegory in England. But his position in the history of the style is very peculiar. Bred up in the court of Edward III., the mirror of European chivalry, he was of course familiar with each form and punctilio which determined the standard of feudal manners, and with every rule of the art of poetry in which these manners were reflected. But he was far from being

[1] Sir Walter Scott mentions a curious case in his Notes to *Anne of Geierstein*, in which the court had to decide which of three lovers had been most highly honoured by a lady, who had conversed with one, while she pressed the hand of another, and touched the foot of a third!

in sympathy with either the one or the other. His native genius, aided by fine taste and judgment, had enabled him to form a conception of nature and society extending far beyond the range of the conventional creed, and contrasting strongly with the flimsy metaphysics of Provençal poetry. Hence there is an element of humour in his treatment of the subject of allegorical Love. He represents himself as an offender against the law of the god. He had translated in his youth both parts of the *Romance of the Rose*, and by so doing had placed himself in the position of an heresiarch. Still more grievous offence must have been given to the orthodox guardians of chivalrous manners by the representation of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*. For here he had not only shown disrespect to the statutes in the character of Pandarus, who is evidently introduced as an exponent of the satirical rules laid down by John de Meung for the guidance of lovers; but he had defied all the established "precedents" by describing a woman unfaithful in love. Male, and still more female, critics would not have been slow to censure him for these outrages: hence, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, he humorously conceives of himself as put upon his trial by the god of Love, making recantation of his heresies, and doing penance for his past sins by the composition of the *Legend* itself. Chaucer had no wish to bring the institutions of knighthood into contempt: nothing can be more respectful or honourable than his pictures of the Knight and the Squire in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales:* but he was the first great painter in modern European literature of real life, and in this capacity he ridiculed—as Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Molière did after him—the extravagant affectations which had grown out of the mere fashion of chivalry. Even in his allegorical compositions we feel that he is the first-born child of the Renaissance.

In this respect Chaucer stands alone among the allegorists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The one Englishman of supreme poetical genius whom the reign of Richard II. produced, his work shows him always

instinctively conscious of the spiritual forces which were beginning to revive the civic standard of life and art. The chivalrous allegories of his immediate followers, on the other hand, have a certain interest of their own, because, reflecting exclusively the conventional manners of the time, they enable the modern reader to reconstruct in his own imagination the ideal of a vanished society. In *The Temple of Glass* by Lydgate, *The King's Quair* by James I. of Scotland, and *The Court of Love*, the highly ingenious work of an unknown English author at the close of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century, we see, as in the lyrics of the troubadours, in the treatise of André le Chapelain, and in the allegory of Guillaume de Lorris, a reflection of the sentiments of court and castle, without any mixture of satire or double intention.

*The Temple of Glass* is a composition conforming at every point to the strict rules governing the fashionable Love-allegory. It takes, of course, the form of a vision, to which the poet is careful, in the orthodox style, to assign a date.[1] Tossing in his bed at night, like all true lovers since the time of Ovid,[2] he is at last oppressed by a deep sleep, in which he dreams that he is carried into the wilderness, where, built on a craggy rock, he finds a Temple of Glass. Into this he enters through one of those "wickets" which usually give allegorical dreamers access to the scene of action,[3] and observes that the walls of the temple are decorated with paintings of such "precedents"

[1] Whan that Lucina with hir pale light
Was joyned last with Phebus in aquarie
Amyd Decembre, when of Januarie
Ther be kalendes of the newe yere,

*i.e.* when the sun and moon were last in conjunction in the middle of December.

[2] Within my bed for soe I gan me shroude,
Al desolate for constreint of my wo,
The longe nyght waloing to and fro.

Compare Ovid, *Amores*, i. 2. 1-4:

Esse quid hoc dicam quod tam mihi dura videntur
Strata, neque in lecto pallia nostra sedent;
Et vacuus somno noctem, quam longa, peregi,
Lassaque versati corporis ossa dolent.

[3] Compare Chaucer's *House of Fame*, 477; *Romance of Rose*, 528-530; *Parlement of Foules*, 119.

of love as are generally employed to decorate the ideal architecture.[1] The temple is filled with lovers who have come thither to "complain" to the goddess, since "the course of true love never does run smooth"; and the poet makes full use of his opportunity to analyse and classify the difficulties, dangers, and misfortunes which spring out of the universal passion. Among these lovers his attention is specially directed to a lady of unequalled beauty, doubtless intended to represent one of the persons whom he means to compliment, just as the old painters introduce into their altar-pieces kneeling portraits of the donors. Like the other votaries, she is making her "complaint" to the goddess, and this is distinguished from the narrative part of the poem—which is written in rhyming couplets of ten syllables—by being embodied in the "royal" or seven-line stanza. The lady complains that she is in love, but is not at liberty to make known her preference. Venus makes a very gracious answer, in the same metre, to the suppliant, and promises her that the satisfaction of her love will be all the sweeter on account of her previous suffering. When the lady has returned devout thanks to the goddess, the latter enjoins her to be faithful to her lover, and throws into her lap boughs of hawthorn, the emblem of constancy. After this a knight appears soliloquising, and very soon makes it plain that he is a most admirable subject of love. What thing is this, he asks, that has happened to him, that he who was once so free is now bound in Cupid's chain? He has seen an angelic creature in the temple; her eyes have wounded him to death; to fight against her is of no avail; he yields himself prisoner. But what will be the end of his torment? Meekness alone can serve him. Let the Lady Venus teach him what is best to do, hanging in the balance between hope and dread. Then he enters into the oratory, and breaks into a very long prayer in the royal stanza, which sets forth how his lady possesses every excellence except the virtue of pity. Nevertheless, whatever his lady's decision may be, he will submit

[1] *House of Fame*, 128-139.

himself humbly to it, and will be as constant to her as Antony to Cleopatra, as Pyramus to Thisbe, as Achilles to Polyxena, as Hercules to Deianira. But let Venus kindle his lady's heart through her son Cupid!

To the supplication of one who has so fully satisfied all the conditions of true love, only one answer is possible; and nothing remains but for the *dea ex machinâ* to bring the divided parties together. This she does in a speech which, considering all the confidences the lady has entrusted to the goddess and the reader, reflects the highest credit upon the former's sense of what is due to her own sex. For in the first place she informs the lady, with an air of severity, as if she had never seen her before, and as if she were only dealing with the claims of the male lover, that she must not carry her resistance too far, else she herself will have to "record cruelty" against her. "Banish danger," she says, "out of your heart, and let in mercy." She then proceeds to give the knight a long lecture on his duties to the lady and to all womankind, but she leaves the other party to the suit entirely free to follow her own discretion. Thereupon all the votaries in the temple unite their voices in a ballad in praise of Venus, and this wakes the poet, who is full of woe at losing sight of so beautiful a lady, and resolves to write a little treatise with "a process" in praise of women.

*The Temple of Glass* concludes with an "Envoy" in which the poet despatches his "litel boke" to his mistress; and from this it may be reasonably conjectured that the allegory was written by the Monk of Bury, at the request of some knight or courtier who wished to pay a compliment to a lady. *The Court of Love*, on the contrary, begins with an announcement of the author's intention to write, for the amusement of his lady, a "litel short treatesse":—

> That is entitled thus, The Court of Love.
> And ye that ben metriciens me excuse,
> I you beseech, for Venus' sake above,
> For what I mean in this ye need not muse:
> And if so be my lady it refuse
> For lacke of ornate speech, I would be wo,
> That I presume to her to writen so.

But my entente and all my busie cure
Is for to write this treatesse as I can
Unto my lady stable, true, and sure,
Faithfull and kind sith first that she began
Me to accept in service as her man;
To her be all the pleasure of this book,
That when her like she may it rede and look.

The reader will easily perceive from this specimen of the versification that *The Court of Love* must be a composition considerably later in date than *The Temple of Glass*.[1] A complete master of his metrical instrument, the author is also far superior to Lydgate in fancy and invention: he knows how to construct a poetical action, and how to make a proper use of the machinery of personification. He is, however, working on precisely the same conventional theme; and the peculiarly interesting feature in his poem is, that the advance in literary and allegorical skill is accompanied by a distinct decline in the delicacy of chivalrous manners.

Philogenet, a clerk of Cambridge, at the age of eighteen years, is driven by Love to seek his court on Mount Citheron. After many inquiries he finds the place, and comes to a fair castle, the chatelaine of which is the queen Alcestis, who lives in it with her husband Admetus. There he espies a friend of his called Philobone, a gentlewoman, "chamberere to the quene," who reproaches him (quite in the spirit of André le Chapelain)[2] for not having come to court before, and tells him that he must look for the displeasure of Love. Her anticipations are soon verified: Love sends for the stranger, and asks him sternly why he is so late in coming; to which Philogenet replies that he has been kept away by shamefastness. After this avowal the god pardons him, and he is allowed to read the twenty statutes that have to be observed in Love's Court. These are cited at length: they are all derived from the old authoritative sources, but contain here and there some very broad allusions, which would

[1] For a very favourable specimen of the versification of the latter, see p. 332.

[2] Andreæ Capellani, *De Amore*, lib. i. cap. 5:—"Ante decimum quartum annum masculus non solet in amoris exercitu militare."

not have been tolerated when chivalry was at its zenith. When Philogenet has perused them, he turns to the book of female statutes, but is sternly interrupted by Rigour, master of the ceremonies, who tells him that no one of the male sex may look into this volume, and despatches him to the temple of Venus, where he finds "a thousand million" lovers praising the goddess. Philogenet, though he is well disposed for love, is not in love with any particular person, and all he can do is to meditate, like Crashaw, on

> That not impossible She,
> Who shall command my heart and me.

His friend Philobone, however, lets him into some of the secrets of the place. From her information we gather that a considerable change has come over the manners of the court. Philogenet is puzzled with a tomb which he sees in the temple—

> So whan I met with Philobone in hie,
> I gan demand whose is this sepulture:
> "Forsooth" (quod she) "a tender creature
>
> "Is shrined here, and Pity is her name.
> She saw an egle wreke him on a flie,
> And pluck his wing and eke him in his game,
> And tender herte of him that made her die:
> Eke she would weep and mourn right pitously,
> To seene a lover suffer great distresse;
> In all the court n'as none, as I do gesse,
>
> "That coud a lover half so well availe,
> Ne of his wo the torment or the rage
> Asken, for he was sure withouten faile,
> That of his grief she coud the heat assuage.
> In steed of Pity speedeth hote corage
> The matters all of court, now she is dead,
> I me refert in this to womanhead.
>
> "For weil, and weep, and cry, and speak, and pray,
> Women would not have pity on thy plaint,
> Ne by that mean to ease thine herte convay,
> But thee receiven for their own talent;
> And say that Pity causeth thee in consent
> Of reuth to take thy service and thy paine
> In that thou maist, to please thy soveraine."

In all this there appears to be a reference to the coarser vein that impaired the manners of chivalry about the reign of Edward IV. Philobone, however, tells her friend of a certain Rosiall, to whom she introduces him, and in whom he at once sees the embodiment of his ideal. To her accordingly he proceeds to make fervent love in the most approved scholastic fashion; but Rosiall is much too faithful a disciple of André le Chapelain to sanction these headlong proceedings:—

> "Nay God forbede to feffe you so with grace,
> And for a word of sugred eloquence
> To have compassion in so little space,
> Than were it time that some of us were hence.
> Ye shall not find in me such insolence."[1]

There is nothing for it but for Philogenet to prove by his behaviour under these trying circumstances that he is a lover of the genuine kind. He first of all makes a long and piteous appeal to his lady for mercy:—

> "With that I fell in sound and dede as stone,
> With colour slaine and wanne as asshe pale,
> And by the hand she caught me up anon,
> "Arise" (quod she) "what? have ye dronken dwale?
> Why slepen ye? it is no nightertale":
> "Now mercy, sweete" (quod I) "ywis (I was?) affraied."
> "What thing" (quod she) "hath made you so dismaied?
>
> "Now wote I well that ye a lover be,
> Your hew is witnesse in this thing," she said:
> "If ye were secret, ye might know" (quod she)
> "Curteis and kind all this should be allaid,
> And now, mine herte, all that I have missaid
> I shall amend and set your heart at ease."
> "That word it is" (quod I) "that doth me please."[2]

Comparing this with the very elaborate precautions that Venus takes in *The Temple of Glass* to preserve the lady's dignity when she begins to favour her lover, we see that the code of manners must, during the fifteenth century, have been considerably relaxed. Philogenet, however, is not privileged at once to enjoy his mistress's

[1] Compare extract from André le Chapelain on pp. 173-74.
[2] See Rules 20, 3, and 15 in the *Statutes of Love* cited on pp. 174-75.

society; he must first be taken by Philobone to see all the mysteries of the court, and be introduced to the usual abstractions, Envy, Despair, Hope, Flattery, Privy Thought, and others, who have been residents in the place since the days of the *Romance of the Rose*. When he has been duly initiated Rosiall returns to him:—

> "Yes, draw your herte with all your force and might
> To lustinesse, and ben as ye have said,
> And think that I no drop of favour hight,
> Ne never had unto your desire obeid,
> Till sodenly me thought me was affraied
> To sene you waxe so dede of Countenaunce,
> And Pite bade me done you some pleasaunce.
>
> "Out of her shrine she rose from deth to live,
> And in mine eare full privily she spake,
> 'Doth not your servaunt hens away to drive,
> Rosiall' (quod she) and than mine herte it brake,
> For tenderiche: and where I found moch lacke
> In your person, than I myself bethought,
> And saide, this is the man mine herte hath sought."

Philogenet, duly grateful, replies with vows of constant service and fidelity, and the poem is concluded by a kind of religious service, in which different birds sing hymns in praise of love.

Midway in point of sentiment between *The Temple of Glass* and *The Court of Love* stands *The Kingis Quair* (the King's Book), an allegorical poem written by James I. of Scotland in 1423. The peculiarity of this composition is that in it the author makes the conventional machinery of the allegorical style the vehicle of his own personal experience: hence the stanza he uses has received the name of "royal." The delicacy, the knightly feeling, the strict attention to prescribed forms of etiquette, which characterise Lydgate's work, are here united with something of the inventive skill shown by the writer of the *Court of Love;* and parts at least of the composition are animated by a genuine lyric spirit, which, considered together with the romantic history of James, gives the *Kingis Quair* a unique place among the allegories of the chivalrous school.

James I., the second son of King Robert III. of Scotland, was born in 1391. After the murder of his elder brother the Duke of Rothesay (related in *The Fair Maid of Perth*) his father in 1405 sent him for safety to France. During the voyage the ship in which he was sailing was captured by an English vessel, and James, being taken to Henry IV. of England, was kept prisoner at Windsor for eighteen years. In the last year of his captivity he saw from his window Joan Beaufort, daughter of the Earl of Somerset, walking in the garden, and falling in love with her at first sight, composed in her honour *The Kingis Quair*. The lady returned his love, and, their attachment being approved on political grounds, they were married in 1424. A ransom was accepted on behalf of James, and he returned to Scotland, and was crowned king on the 21st of May in the same year. His later history, with its tragic close, when, after a reign of thirteen years, he was, in spite of the heroic devotion of Catherine Douglas, murdered in the presence of his wife, forms a striking episode of Scottish history.[1]

The design of *The Kingis Quair*, in spite of a little confusion in the order of the narrative, is remarkably happy.[2] In imitation of his master, Chaucer, with whose works he had become familiar during his captivity,[3] the king describes himself as having read Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* during a sleepless night. Deeply

[1] Speaking in the usual allegorical vein of Joan's return of his love the king says :

> And thus this floure, I can seye you no more,
> So hertly has unto my herte attendit,
> That from the deth her man sche has defendit.

It is a remarkable coincidence that the queen afterwards sought to save her husband from actual assassination by throwing herself between him and his murderers.

[2] All readers should study Professor Skeat's admirable edition of the poem (published for the Scottish Text Society). I cannot, however, subscribe to his view that the king began his work without any distinct idea of the way in which he would end it. Such a hypothesis robs the conception of its chief beauty. The main theme of the poem is the mutability of fortune, but James writes in a spirit of gratitude, and illustrates his subject by his own experience, in which a career of long misfortune has been crowned by a happy love. The opening of the poem, in which he says that his intention was to write about his misfortunes, is merely an artistic way of emphasising the contrast.

[3] Compare the opening of the *Parlement of Foules*, where Chaucer tells how during a sleepless night he read the *Somnium Scipionis*.

impressed with the reflections of his author, he thinks how applicable they are to his own case, and, when the bells ring for matins, they seem to him to be bidding him tell the story of his fortunes. He accordingly makes a +, and begins his tale with the melancholy recital of his capture, and of the long sorrows he endured up to the eighteenth year of his imprisonment, and that happy day when he went to his window—

> And therewith kest I doun myn eye ageyne,
> Quhare as I sawe, walking under the toure,
> Full secretly new cummyn hir to pleyne,
> The fairest or the freschest yonge floure
> That ever I sawe, me thoght, before that houre,
> For quhyele sodayn abate, anon astert
> The blude of all my body to my hert.

The blessed vision passes out of his sight, and this of course brings him to the very climax of his misfortunes. All the rest of the day he makes his moan like a true lover, but at night, worn out with weeping and lamenting, he falls into a slumber which sets in operation the usual allegorical dream machinery. Parting from his body his spirit makes its way by the orthodox "Itinerary" to the sphere of Venus, where it finds a multitude of lovers, classified in an order much resembling that adopted by Lydgate in *The Temple of Glass*,[1] and where it finally encounters Venus herself, to whom it makes the inevitable "complaint," or, as James prefers on this occasion to call it, "salute." There is, however, a note of novelty in this address, which introduces us to the doctrine of the planetary influences, so prevalent in the Middle Ages:—

> Hye quene of lufe! sterre of benevolence!
> Pitouse princess, and planet merciable!
> Appeser of malice and violence!
> By vertew pure of your aspectis stable,
> Unto your grace lat now ben acceptable
> My pure request, that can no forthir gone
> To seken help, bot unto yow allone.

Venus listens to him favourably, but explains that there are other influences which must determine his fortune,

[1] Compare *Kingis Quair*, stanzas 82-93, with *Temple of Glass*, 143-246.

and that, in the first place, he must betake himself, under the guidance of Good Hope, to Minerva. Minerva, the goddess of patience, expert in all questions of theology, does not hesitate to quote Ecclesiastes, or to plunge for his edification into the question of Free-Will and Necessity. Though all things are fore-ordained, still, as she explains, the more fore-knowledge a man has, the more he can control his fortune; but as King James is weak in this respect, he must mainly trust to the kindness of Fortune herself; and to that goddess she accordingly despatches him. Fortune shows him the manner in which she works her wheel, upon which she bids him boldly mount, but just as he has done so she takes him, as he says, by the ear "so ernestly that therewithal I woke." Fearful lest all this should prove no more than a dream, yet not without hope, he goes to his window, when a turtle-dove alights on his hand, bearing in her bill a branch of gillyflowers with the inscription :—

Awake! awake! I bring, lufar, I bring
The newis glad that blisfull ben and sure
Of thy comfort; now lauch, and play, and syng,
That art beside so glad an aventure;
For in the hevyn decrevit is thy cure.

The bird then spreads her wings and flies away, while the king, delighted with the omen, breaks into an enthusiastic song of gratitude for the chain of events that had led him to his good fortune, and concludes his poem with the following curious stanza :—

Unto the Impnis[1] of my maisters dere,
Gowere and Chaucere, that on the steppis satt
Of rhetorike, quhile thei were lyvand here,
Superlative as poets laureate,
In moralitee and eloquence ornate,
I recommend my buk in lynis sevin,
And eke their saules unto the blisse of hevin. Amen.

As there are few indications in James's work of Gower's influence, it is probable that the admiration here expressed

[1] Hymns.

for him arose chiefly from the skill he had shown in the metrical use of English. Chaucer, on the other hand, may fairly be called James's "master," and *The Kingis Quair* is full of recollections of the English poet's writings; nevertheless in design and execution it bears the stamp of original genius, and two of its passages—the apostrophe to the nightingale, when Joan appears in the garden, and the concluding outburst of gratitude for the poet's good fortune —deserve to be recorded among the flowers of early English poetry.[1]

*The Kingis Quair* may be said to form a landmark in the history of allegorical poetry. After the middle of the fifteenth century we observe a rapid ebb in the inspiring forces to which this class of composition originally owed its being. There is no longer a flowing tide of religious contemplation, producing allegories like the *Vita Nuova* and *The Pearl;* nor is the lyrical impulse sustained, which, springing out of the spirit and manners of chivalry, found expression first in the minstrelsy of the troubadours, and afterwards in the long series of fictions derived from the first part of the *Romance of the Rose.* The motive power of original production has sunk with the dwindling life of monasticism and feudalism; but it has left behind it a fully developed literary mould, into which all metrical composers are now inclined to cast their ideas; a habit of finding resemblances between material and spiritual things, and a tendency to make a mere mechanical use of personification as a figure of rhetoric. Henceforth this established method of poetical composition is itself largely modified by various external forces, religious, social, and literary, which have their origin in very different springs of thought.

Of these forces I propose to speak at some length in the next volume when considering the combined general causes that helped to develop the movement usually known as the Renaissance. But in the meantime it will be necessary to summarise them, in order that the reader may understand the reasons for the progressive changes

[1] *The Kingis Quair*, stanzas 54-60, 189-193.

in the form of allegorical poetry. The most powerful factor of change was the removal of the sovereign influence in matters of taste, which had hitherto been diffused through a multitude of monasteries and castles, to a single centre, the Court. All the arts were gradually absorbed into the service of the royal pleasure; consequently allegory, from being a vehicle of devotional feeling, or an esoteric instrument of social freemasonry regulating the intercourse of the sexes, was gradually transformed into a mode of intellectual amusement for the king and his retinue. The natural effect of this change of character was to deprive allegory of the mystical atmosphere with which Platonic tradition had helped to invest it, and thereby to superannuate a considerable part of the time-honoured machinery. After the first half of the fifteenth century, for example, we seldom meet with the spiritual "Itinerary" of which the earlier allegorical poets make so much use. Venus and Cupid lose many of their symbolical attributes: the imagery of the Courts of Love is no longer employed; the Vision with all its ideal landscape occupies a much less prominent place than formerly in the design. As the monastic or chivalric sentiment declines in these compositions, so does the scholastic motive advance: the poet thinks principally of showing his learning: he is careful in the invention of his plot: he has a set moral: yet, while he lets us see on all occasions that he has had the advantage of an encyclopædic education, he does not forget that he must provide for the amusement as well as the instruction of his hearers. Hence he borrows many hints from the dramatic entertainments most in vogue. He imparts to his epic narrative some of the elements of the Morality or the Pageant; and, as the old chivalrous abstractions—Love with his different attendants, Shame, Jealousy, Danger, Wicked-Tongue, and the like—drop out of the action, he supplies their places with a host of mythological personages, the revived offspring of pagan fable.

Such are the characteristics of what may be called the Middle School of Allegory, forming the link between the

chivalrous type of the style introduced by Chaucer from the Continent, and its final literary development in the hands of Spenser. Were we, indeed, dependent upon English examples of this class of composition, we should be unable to trace with exactness the stages of the evolution; for between the death of Lydgate and the appearance of Stephen Hawes—a period of fifty years—the history of English poetry is a complete blank. For this long interval of barrenness the bloody civil wars of the time sufficiently account; *inter arma silent Musæ;* but fortunately the contemporary poetry of Scotland allows us to observe accurately the progress of an art, the course of which in the southern kingdom had been so rudely interrupted. The Scottish poetry of the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth century is, in spite of minor differences of orthography and grammatical inflection, the direct offspring of the school of Chaucer. Carried north by James I. after his release from captivity, the tradition thus established was continued by Henryson, Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas, to a point from which we can easily resume its history in England. During this epoch the court of the Scottish kings illustrates the forces which were transforming the structure of feudal and ecclesiastical society. For while the surface of Scottish life was always stormy and troubled, the succession to the throne itself was undisputed, and the kingdom, relieved for the time from the fear of invasion by its powerful neighbour, made rapid progress in the Continental arts and refinements which flowed into it from its intercourse with France. The history and poetry of the nation mutually illuminate the surviving monuments of its thoughts and actions.

The earliest representative of this Middle School of Allegory in Scotland is Robert Henryson.[1] Born about 1425, he was admitted a member of Glasgow University, Licentiate in Arts and Bachelor in Decrees in 1462, and afterwards became a schoolmaster in connection with the Benedictine monastery at Dunfermline, in which town he was notary public. He died probably near the end of

[1] An edition of his works by D. Laing was published in 1865.

the century. Among his principal works were *Orpheus and Eurydice*, an adaptation from Boethius, in which the mythological story is more or less allegorised, and fitted with a suitable moral; *The Testament of Cresseid*, a very curious continuation of Chaucer's story, relating how Cressida became a leper, and how her beauty so entirely disappeared that Troilus bestowed an alms upon her without knowing her; *Robene and Makyne*, a pastoral dialogue interesting as containing plainly the metrical germ of the famous ballad of the *Nut-brown Maid*. In all these poems the moral element is very dominant, but it finds its most powerful expression in the *Moral Fables*, a work in which Henryson applies the style of Æsop to the manners of his own day. The following stanzas set forth the poet's purpose:—

My author in his Fabellis tellis how
That brutall Beistis spak and understude,
And to gude purpose dispute and argow,
Ane syllogisme propone, and eke conclude;
Putting exempile and similitude;
How mony men in operatioun
Are lyke to bestis in conditioun.

Na marevll is ane man be lyke ane beist,
Quhilk luffis ay carnall and foul delyte,
That schame can nocht him range, nor arreist,
But takis all the lust and appetyte,
And that throw custume and the daylie ryte
Syne in their myndes so fast is radicate,
That thay in brutall beistis are transformate.

Besides his fondness for classical themes and his tendency to regard all subjects from a moral point of view, Henryson gives signs of the approach of the Renaissance in his *pictorial* treatment of allegory. The descriptions of his abstract personages are highly generalised in the manner of the Latin poets, and at the same time show that attention to the effects of pageantry which is so marked a feature in the poetry of Spenser. The following picture of Summer is a good example of his style:—

The somer with his jolye mantill of grene,
With flouris fair furrit on everilk fent,[1]
Quilk Flora, goddes of the flouris quene,
Hes to that lord as for his seasoun lent,
And Phœbus with his golden bemis gent
Hes purfellit[2] and paynted plesandlie
With heat and moysture stilland from the skie.
*The Preiching of the Swallow*, v. 57.

The chief place among the Scottish poets who flourished before the Reformation has been assigned to William Dunbar. Specimens of his poems, including *The Golden Targe*, *The Thistle and the Rose*, and *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, were published by Lord Hailes in 1770, and, appearing at a time when the current of taste, both in England and Scotland, was setting in the direction of antiquity, were welcomed with a somewhat exaggerated enthusiasm. Warton was generous in his appreciation of Dunbar's merits.[3] Scott, in the next generation, proclaimed him to be the greatest of Scottish poets.[4] Campbell compared him with Chaucer.[5] His poems, collected in 1834 by David Laing, allow us to form a cooler estimate of his genius, and show us that Dunbar, while possessing a rich, vigorous, and versatile imagination, wanted the qualities which entitle a man to the front rank in the history of national poetry. Essentially a poet of the court, his talents were always employed in satisfying the momentary tastes of his patrons, so that though his works are of great importance to the antiquary, he rarely touches those notes of human interest which are the passport to the sympathy of the general reader.[6]

Very little is known of his life. As he took the degree of Master of Arts in St. Andrews University in 1479, he was probably born before 1460. Entering the Order of St. Francis or the Grey Friars, he seems to have passed a considerable portion of his earlier life as a wandering

[1] Opening. [2] Embroidered.
[3] *History of English Poetry*, sect. xxx.
[4] *Memorials of George Bannatyne*, p. 14.
[5] Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets*, vol. ii. p. 68.
[6] A careful edition of Dunbar's Works, from the hand of Mr. Æ. J. G. Mackay, has been issued by the Scottish Text Society, 1889.

preacher, making acquaintance not only with England, but with the Continent.[1] In 1491 he was probably a member of the embassy sent to France under the Earl of Bothwell, being employed to make copies and records of the negotiations. As a reward for this and other diplomatic services, and perhaps in recompense for his duties as court poet, he was awarded in 1500 an annual pension of £10, to be paid until he should be promoted to a benefice of the value of more than £40 a year. From this time forwards he poured forth, for the amusement of his patrons, a constant stream of ballads, complimentary verses, satires, burlesques, and humorous addresses to the king, the main purpose of which was to point out the long delay in the arrival of his promised preferment. It does not appear, indeed, that his particular expectation was ever gratified, but in 1507 his pension was increased from £10 to £20, and in 1510 to £80, so that, compared with other dependent members of his profession, his career as a poet may be regarded as a successful one. The date of his death is uncertain, but it probably occurred before 1530.

As a poet he may be described as a jongleur transformed to meet the requirements of a literary age. His poems show a shrewd knowledge of men and manners, and remarkable skill in presenting, under a variety of novel aspects, the somewhat narrow range of themes acceptable to a court. His favourite poetical device was to carry a single burden or refrain through a number of stanzas, each containing a different turn of thought; but he frequently amused the king and queen with personal satires on the courtiers, or with rapid sketches of scenes in actual life, which have all the character of improvisations.

His allegories, like those of Henryson, indicate the influence both of classical studies and court pageants on the

[1] In freiris weid full fairly have I fleichit,
In it haif I in pulpet gone and preichit,
In Derntoun Kirk and eik in Canterberry;
In it I passed at Dover ore the ferry,
Throw Picardy, and thair the peple teechit.
*Visitation of St. Francis.*

older forms of chivalric symbolism. *The Golden Targe* has a plot of some ingenuity. Falling asleep, in the orthodox fashion, one May morning, by the side of a river, the poet beholds in his dream a ship approaching from which a hundred ladies land. This is the Court of Venus, which includes all the heathen goddesses, the chief of whom are duly enumerated ; and it is presently joined by the Court of Cupid, equally well attended by the gods of Latin poetry. The two companies combine, and please themselves with music, singing, and dancing. Coming out of his concealment to view the sight, the poet is espied by Venus, who orders her archers to arrest him ; whereupon Dame Beauty assails him with a whole troop of feminine Attractions, such as Fair Having, Fine Portraiture, Pleasaunce, and Lusty Cheer. Reason, however, appears in his defence, and protects him from these assailants behind a Golden Targe or Shield, with which Youth, Innocence, Dread, and Obedience are also successfully repulsed ; but at last Venus orders Dissimulation to bring up her reserves in aid of Beauty, and the eyes of Reason being blinded with a powder, the poet is taken prisoner. Beguiled by Dissimulation, he continues in the company of Cherishing and New Acquaintance, till Danger at last hands him over to the keeping of Heaviness ; at which point Æolus blows a great blast upon his trumpet ; the abstractions vanish ; and the poet, waking out of his dream, concludes his composition with some stanzas in praise of "reverend Chaucer," "moral Gower," and "Lydgate laureate."

*The Thistle and the Rose* is a complimentary poem, written to celebrate the marriage between Margaret, daughter of Henry VII. of England, and James IV. of Scotland. Great ingenuity is shown in the conduct of this allegory, which in some parts seems to have been suggested by Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules.* Nature first summons the animals to receive her orders, and gives instructions to the Lion, king of beasts—the emblem of the Scottish nation—for the good government of his realm. She then addresses herself to the flowers,

and, committing sovereignty to the "awful Thistle," bids him cherish above all others the "fresh Rose," which at the same time she crowns, and hails as Queen of Flowers. The poem is concluded with the conventional concert of birds, who praise the Rose, and of course awake the poet.

*Beauty and the Prisoner* describes, in a succession of stanzas all ending with the word "prisoner," the manner in which the poet was taken captive by Beauty, his lady, and of his various fortunes up to the point where Slander appeared to be master of the field :—

> Than Matrimony, that noble king,
> Was grievit, and gatherit ane great host,
> And all enermit [1] without leising
> Chased Sklander to the West Sea coast;
> Than was he and his liniage lost,
> And Matrimony, withouten weir,
> The band of friendship has indost
> Betwix Beauty and her Prisoneir.

This stanza will enable the reader to perceive how far abstraction and impersonation, originally modes of philosophical thought, had been carried as mere ornaments of poetical style.

*The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* is an allegory of a different kind, in which the spirit of parody and burlesque predominates. Lord Hailes, Warton, Campbell, and other critics, have regarded this poem as a proof of Dunbar's original genius,—credit to which he is hardly entitled. Little invention was in fact required for the composition, which is merely a literary adaptation of the "Dance of Death," a long-established pageant in the carnivals of the Continent. Lord Hailes observes: "The drawing of the picture is bold, the figures well grouped. I do not recollect ever to have seen the 'Seven Deadly Sins' painted by a more masterly pencil than that of Dunbar." In the grouping of the sins the Scottish allegorist merely followed the usual theological order; and, as regards the drawing, no reader of the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* will be prepared to admit that there can be

[1] Armed.

any comparison between Langland's portrait of "Envy"[1] and the following description :—

> Next in the dance followit Envy,
> Filled full of feud and felony,
> Hid malice and despite ;
> For privy hatred that traitor tremlit,
> Him followit mony freik dissemlit
> With fenyeit wordis quite :
> And flatterers in to men's faces,
> And backbiters in secret places,
> To lie that had delight ;
> And rownards of false leasings,[2]
> Alace ! the courts of noble kings
> Of them can never be quit.

Scarcely less celebrated as a poet in his own age than Dunbar, and certainly on the whole a more important figure for the historian of poetry, Gavin Douglas heralds the introduction into the chivalrous school of allegory of the classical style, which received its fullest development from the hands of Spenser.[3] Born in 1474, the third son of Archibald, fifth Earl of Douglas, known as "Bell the Cat," Gavin, who was intended for the Church, received a careful education in all the liberal arts of the time. He matriculated in the University of St. Andrews in 1489 ; took his degree of Determinant or Bachelor of Arts in 1492, and of Licentiate or Master of Arts in 1494. On leaving the University he entered into priest's orders, and, after receiving several minor appointments, was made dean of the Collegiate Church of St. Giles in Edinburgh in 1501, between which date and 1513, the year of the battle of Flodden, was comprised the period of his literary activity. His earliest extant work, *The Palace of Honour*, was written in 1501 ; *King Hart* may have been composed in any subsequent year before 1512, when Gavin began his translation of the *Æneid*, which he completed in 1513. Of his later history, full as it was of turbulence, intrigue, and personal disappointment, it is unnecessary to say more than that, having been

[1] See pp. 240-41. [2] Whisperers of false lies.

[3] An edition of G. Douglas's works, in 4 vols. by J. Small, was published in 1874.

appointed to the bishopric of Dunkeld in 1516, he took part with the Earl of Angus in his struggle with Queen Margaret and the Regent Albany, and coming to London in 1521, to negotiate with Wolsey on his nephew's behalf, died there of the plague in 1522. He was buried in the Hospital Church of the Savoy, and the brass tablet, which once marked the place where his body was interred, is still preserved in the Savoy Chapel.[1]

*The Palace of Honour*, poor as a composition, is historically interesting as marking the transition from the old allegory on the subject of love, to the moral style which came into favour through the influence of the Classical Renaissance. Here, as in Dunbar's *Golden Targe*, we find the poet preserving the conventional machinery of allegory: the ideal landscape, the Vision, the complaint about the cruelty of Fortune (of whom at this period Gavin had certainly no personal right to complain), and the Court of Venus, in which he is put upon his trial for writing a ballad against the goddess and her votaries. In this part of the poem it is noticeable that Venus is the prominent personage; that Amor, or Cupid, or Love, who in the earlier allegories is sovereign of the court, occupies a subordinate place; while the poet actually disputes the competence of the tribunal on two grounds: first, that *ladies may not be judges;* and, secondly, that Gavin himself, being "a spiritual man," is not accountable to a lay court.[2] Judgment is about to be given against the poet, who fears that he will be put to death or transformed into a beast, when suddenly the Court of the Muses appears upon the scene, and, at the intercession of Calliope,

[1] The inscription is interesting: "Here lies Thomas Halsey, Bishop of Leighlin, confessor of the English nation in the Church of St. Stephen at Rome, who left this only thing after him, while he lived, he lived well. On whose left lies Gavan Dolkglas, by birth a Scot, Bishop of Dunkeld, an exile from his native land," 1522.

[2] Madame, ye may not sit into this case,
For ladies may be judges in na place;
And mairatouir I am na secular,
A spirituall man (though I be void of lair)
Cleipit I am, and ought my lives spare
To be remit to my judge ordinair.

Gavin is pardoned, on condition that he shall compose a ballad in praise of Love. Promptly complying with this requirement, he is then taken by the Muse on a tour round the habitable world, in the course of which he comes to a rock of "hard marble stone," shining like glass in the sun, on which is built the Palace of Honour. This he ascends with the help of his guide, but near the top he beholds the place of punishment for idle people, the sight of which fills him with so much alarm, that he is only prevented from making his way down by Calliope, who, seizing him by the hair of his head, "as Abacuk was brought to Babylon," drags him to the top. There he beholds the tempestuous sea of the world with a "lusty ship" tossing upon it, which Calliope, who, though a pagan Muse, is well versed in the dogmas of the Christian religion, informs him is the "carwell," or ship, of the state of Grace, necessary for man's salvation. A minute description of the Palace of Honour follows, in the course of which the poet finds an opportunity to enumerate all the leading characters of sacred and secular history, together with the cardinal and theological virtues, and to show his knowledge of the Ptolemaic system. Having penetrated through the gates of the castle, he is on the point of following "his nymph" over a narrow bridge into an inner enclosure, when (happily for the reader) he falls into the moat, which wakes him from his dream, and enables him to end his poem with a ballad in praise of honour and virtue.

*King Hart* is an allegory descriptive of the progress of human life, in which the various faculties of the body and mind are impersonated. The idea was suggested by that description of the Castle of Inwyt in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* which furnished Spenser with his allegory of the Lady Alma and the House of Temperance in the *Faerie Queen*.[1] *King Hart* shows a great advance on *The Palace of Honour* in narrative power and in

[1] *Piers the Plowman* (Skeat, vol. i. p. 265). Langland himself borrowed some ideas from an old English Homily called *Sawles Warde*, for which see Morris, *Old English Homilies*, p. 245.

versification. The influence of the study of Virgil is particularly visible in the metrical syntax, and though the vocabulary is exceedingly archaic, yet compared with the hobbling verse of contemporary English poets, like Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay, the rhythmical movement in Douglas's stanzas is the very soul of melody, as may be seen from the opening of the poem :—

> King Hart, into his cumlie castell strang,
> Closit about with craft and mickle ure,
> So semlie was he set his folk amang
> That he no doubt had of misáventure :
> So proudlie was he polist, plane and pure,
> With youthhead and his lusty levis grene ;
> So fair, so fresh, so likely to endure,
> And als so blyth as bird in simmer schene.

Here it will be observed that nothing is wanting to develop the measure into the nine-line stanza used in the *Faerie Queene* but an added Alexandrine. The eight-line stanza had been introduced into English poetry by Chaucer, who took it from the French ; but a great advance is noticeable in Douglas's versification both as regards swiftness of movement and disposition of accent. The first of these improvements is due to the protraction of the sentence. Instead of a number of short sentences, many of them confined within one line, and few of them extended beyond two, a single sentence, linked together by subordinate clauses in the Latin fashion, may now, as in the example just given, be carried through a whole stanza. The more regular distribution of the accent is due to the disappearance, from the Northern dialect used by Douglas, of the final *e*, the surviving symbol of inflection ; and also to the fact that, in many of the words imported from the French, the accent, forced to follow the Teutonic law, has been removed from the final syllable to one of the syllables of the stem. Thus the following words which in Chaucer's verse would have been usually, if not invariably, pronounced Pleasánce, Jealousýe, Honoúr, Mirroúr, Natúre, Discretioún, Tresoúr, Beauté, Pité, become in *King Hart*, Pleásance, Jélousy, Hónour,

Mírrour, Náture, Discrétion, Treásour, Beaútye, Pítie. The alteration in the general rhythmical effect may be gathered from a comparison of the following stanza from Chaucer's *Fortune* with that from *King Hart* already cited :—

> O Socrates, thou stedfast champioun,
> She never mighte be thy tormentour ;
> Thou never dreddest hir oppressioun,
> Ne in her chere founde thou no savour.
> Thou knewe wel the deceit of hir colour,
> And that hir mostë worshipe is to lye.
> I knowe hir eek a fals dissimulour,
> For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye !

Gavin Douglas anticipates Spenser, not only in his metrical style, but also in his use of allegory as a method of interpreting nature. As the expectation of the approaching end of the visible world, which had for so many centuries haunted the imagination of men, waned, the desire to realise the nature of the unseen universe also began to disappear, leaving, however, behind it, in minds of a religious temper, a profound sense of the vanity of mortal things. This feeling, blended with the growing habit of moral reflection and the quickened perception of beauty, was fostered by the love which the pioneers of the Renaissance entertained for Virgil, an author whose depth of religious sentiment was only equalled by his profound knowledge of the resources of his art. No poet, not even Dante himself, ever drank more deeply of the spirit of Virgil than Gavin Douglas. Deeply versed in Catholic doctrine, he read into his theological studies the gravity, the melancholy, the sweetness, of his master in poetry. He showed his love for him by turning the *Æneid* for the first time into English ten-syllable rhyming couplets, and even more by the sentiment and style of the original Prologues which he prefixed to each book of his translation. Particularly notable are the Prologues to the sixth and seventh books. In the former, while he proclaims his fervent belief in the Christian religion, he indignantly rebukes those who regard the tale of Æneas' descent to the nether world as a narrative of "ghosts and

brownies," and maintains that the sixth book of the *Æneid* is an inspired allegory of the future life. The Prologue to the seventh book contains a description of winter of extraordinary beauty and power, showing how thoroughly Douglas had learned from Virgil the art of associating human feelings with the varying aspects of external nature. He describes how in winter—

> Rivers run on spait with water brown
> And burnis hurlis all their bankis down;

and how—

> O'er craggis and the front of rochës sere
> Hang gret ice schoklis[1] lang as ony spere;

and again,—

> So bustuysly[2] Boreas his bugle blew,
> The deer full dern[3] doun in the dalis drew.
> Small byrdis flocking through thick ronnis thrang,
> In chyrming and with cheping changed their sang,
> Seeking hidlis and hernys thaime to hyde
> From fearfull thudis of the tempestuous tyde.[4]

While he lay awake,—

> The wyld geese, clacking eke by nichtis tyde,
> Above the citie flying heard I glyde.

As the night wore on,—

> Approaching near the greiking[5] of the day,
> Within my bed I wakened where I lay.
> So fast declinis Cynthia the moon,
> And kais keklis on the roof aboon.[6]
> Palamedes' byrdis, crouping in the sky,
> Flying at random, shapen like a Y,
> And as a trumpet rang their voices soun,
> Whose crying bene pronosticatioun
> Of windy blastis and ventosities.

All this is quite in the spirit of the first *Georgic;* and Douglas goes on to assimilate these appearances of nature to his own mood :—

[1] Icicles. [2] Boisterously. [3] Secretly.
[4] Small birds flocking through thick brambles thronged, cheeping and piping as they changed their song, and sought hiding-places and corners to shelter them from the blasts of the tempestuous weather.
[5] The dawn, the gray. [6] Jackdaws cackle.

And as I bound me to the fyre me by,
Both up and down the house I did espy,
And seeing Virgill on a lectern stand,
To write anon I hynt a pen in hand,
For to perform the poet grave and sad,
Whom so far forth, ere then, begun I had,
And wox annoyit some dele in my hart
There rested incomplete so gret a part.
And to myself I said: "In guid effect
Thou man draw forth, the yoke lies on thy neck."
Within my mind compassing thought I so,
No thing is done while ought remains to do.[1]

We naturally think by contrast of poor Lydgate's groan over his translation of the *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*.[2]

It is depressing to turn from the noble and musical, if archaic, versification of Douglas, to the work of his English contemporaries, Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay, poets in whom the principle of metrical harmony, as practised by Chaucer, seems to have almost perished. Nevertheless, if the compositions of these men be regarded as monuments of the march of thought, and as stages in the development of our poetry, they are by no means without historical interest.

*The Pastime of Pleasure* was an allegory written in the twenty-first year of Henry VII.'s reign by Stephen Hawes, of whom little is known but that he was groom of the king's chamber, and a native of Suffolk, and that, after having studied at Oxford, he completed his education by travels in France.[3] The poem is divided into sections after the manner of Malory's translation of the *Mort d'Arthure*, which romance—one of the earliest productions of Caxton's press—evidently suggested to Hawes the character of his composition. Graunde Amoure, the hero of the story, meets with Fame, who tells him of a peerless

[1] A reminiscence of Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ii. 657:—

Nil actum credens, cum quid superesset agendum.

[2] See p. 324.

[3] An edition of the *Pastime of Plessure*, by Mr. Thomas Wright, was published by the Percy Society in 1843.

damsel, called La Bell Pucell, shut up in the Tower of Music, and fills him with desire to go in quest of her. To help him in his adventure, Fame leaves him two greyhounds (the favourite dog of Romance) Grace and Governance, and these bring him to the Tower of Doctrine or Science, who introduces him to grammar, logic, and rhetoric—the arts which formed the trivium—and to arithmetic. Fortified with this preliminary training in the art of love, Graunde Amoure finds La Bell Pucell in the Tower of Music, and holds with her "a dolorous and lowly disputation." Chapters nineteen and twenty recount "How La Pucell graunted Graunde Amoure love, and of her dispiteous departage" from the Tower of Music; and "Of the great sorrow that Graunde Amoure made after her departyng, and of the words of Counsayl." Whether to console himself for the absence of his lady, or to become more worthy of her regard, Graunde Amoure next takes to the study of geometry and astronomy, and, having thus completed the quadrivium, is knighted by a certain King Melazyus. Leaving the court of this monarch, he is overtaken by one False Report, who has changed his name to Godfrey Gobilive, and speaks evil of women; and in this very bad company Graunde Amoure comes to the temple of Venus, where he puts up a "supplication." Venus, having addressed a letter on his behalf to La Bell Pucell, despatches it to her by Cupid, while the accomplished knight shows his chivalrous prowess by slaying (for no very apparent reason) a couple of giants, one with three and the other with seven heads. After a long probation he marries La Bell Pucell, and lives happily with her for many years, till he is arrested by Age, who brings with him Policy and Avarice. Finally he is arrested by Death, and Remembrance writes his epitaph, in a vein by no means usual on mortuary monuments, since, instead of dilating on the virtues of this deceased knight, it dwells at great length upon the seven deadly sins.

*The Pastime of Pleasure* is a strange compound of

several literary styles. For the main motive, the education of Graunde Amoure, Hawes is indebted to Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury and Philology;* the character of the narrative is suggested, as has been already observed, by Malory's *Mort d'Arthure;* while a lingering tradition of the chivalrous allegory is preserved from Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, of which Hawes was a great admirer.[1] His story, however, shows how completely the life of this tradition had died out of the "machines." Graunde Amoure and La Bell Pucell have got on excellent terms with each other long before Venus appears upon the scene, and the letter addressed by the goddess to the lady, warning her against cruelty, is obviously entirely superfluous. The style of the composition is as languid and prolix as might be expected from its motive, and the versification gives no sign of the approach of Surrey. One beautiful image has survived the insipidities of which the poem is mainly composed, and has secured a place in the national memory:—

> For though the dayës be nevir so long,
> At last the bellës ringeth to evensong.

But as a whole the intellectual atmosphere we breathe makes us feel that life has been crushed out of feudalism by the Wars of the Roses; that Henry VII. is king; and that the brilliant, if fantastic, ideal of the knight has been replaced by the hollow artifices of the courtier.

We are brought to the same conclusion, though by a different path, in reading the poems of John Skelton, a writer whose position and career offer in some respects

[1] The manner in which Hawes speaks of Lydgate shows the mechanical spirit of his own allegory:—

> Whose fatall fictions are yet permanent,
> Grounded on reason with cloudy figures
> He cloked the trouth of all his Scryptures.
>
> The lyght of trouth I lacke cunnyng to cloke,
> To drawe a curtayne I dare not presume,
> Nor hyde my matter with a misty smoke,
> My rudeness cunnyng doth so sore consume:
> Yet as I may I shall blow out a fume,
> To hyde my mynde underneath a fable,
> By covert colours well and probable.

a parallel to the fortunes of Dunbar in Scotland. Born of an old family in Norfolk, about 1460, Skelton took his M.A. degree at Cambridge in 1484, and some time before 1490 received at Oxford the laureateship, a special degree conferred for proficiency in grammar and versification.[1] His reputation as a man of learning and letters procured for him the appointment of tutor to Prince Henry, afterwards Henry VIII., for whom he composed a treatise called *Speculum Principis*, which is not extant. While discharging this duty he was complimented by Erasmus, who, in a preamble to an ode addressed to Prince Henry, calls Skelton *Britannicarum literarum lumen ac decus.* He took orders in 1498, and held the rectory of Diss in Norfolk in the early years of the sixteenth century. When he began to compose in English verse is uncertain, but since it appears from an entry in the Cambridge Registers, in 1504, that, as laureate in that university, he was allowed to wear a dress given him by the king, it may perhaps be assumed that, at the date just named, he had like Dunbar a recognised appointment as court poet. A satirical allusion in Barclay's *Ship of Fools* to the *Dirge of Philip Sparrow* shows that the latter poem must have been written before 1508, and it is reasonable to suppose that *The Bowge of Court* was the fruit of the same period. His reputation was at its height in 1520, about which time he composed at Sheriff Hutton, in Yorkshire, the seat of the Duke of Norfolk,—probably at the instance of the Countess of Richmond, grandmother of Henry VIII.,—his *Garland of Laurel*, an allegorical poem in praise of himself and his works. When the star of Wolsey began to rise, Skelton panegyrised him in a dedication prefixed to his *Boke of the Three Foles;* but his *Colin Clout*, written apparently shortly before 1520, contains several strokes at the Cardinal; and, whatever the cause may have been, his enmity in later years was openly expressed in the bitter satire and

[1] See the life prefixed to Mr. Dyce's edition of his works, published in two vols. (1856).

invective of *Why come ye not to Court?* and *Speke, Parrot.* Pursued by the anger of Wolsey, Skelton took refuge in Westminster, where he was protected by Abbot Islip till his death, which took place in 1529.

In the verse of Skelton scarcely a trace of chivalrous sentiment, or of the polished style of composition introduced by Chaucer, can be found. Such talent as he possessed was for burlesque. He finds pleasure in abasing ideals that have been hitherto reverenced and admired, travestying, for example, in *Philip Sparrow*, the services of the Church, the sentiment of the romances, and the ostentation of encyclopædic learning. He imitates the manner of Langland—though without his moral purpose—in his impersonations, which are evidently portraits taken from real life. The figure of Riot in *The Bowge of Court* is painted with hardly less vigour than that of Covetyse in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman:*

> Wyth that came Ryotte, russhying all at ones,
> A rusty gallande, to-ragged and to-rente;
> And on the borde he whyrled a payre of bones,
> *Quater trêye dews* he clatered as he wente;
> Now have at all, by saynte Thomas of Kente.
> And ever he threwe and kyst, I wote nere what:
> His here was growen thorowe oute his hat.
>
> Thenne I behelde how he disgysed was:
> His hede was hevy for watchynge over nighte,
> His eyen blered, his face shone lyke a glas;
> His gowne so short that it ne cover mighte
> His rumpe, he wente so all for somer lyghte.
> His hose were garded with a lyste of grene,
> Yet at the knee they were broken, I wene.

Sometimes, as in the *Tunning of Eleanor Rumming*, he imitates low life with all the coarse relish of a Dutch painter. To Langland he probably owes his conception of Colin Clout, a plain countryman who simply collects and reports the hard things which the common folk say of the higher clergy.

With such motives of composition it would be of course idle to look in Skelton's verse for any refinement of style. He probably felt that Chaucer's artificial system

of versification, depending largely on the preservation of the symbol of inflection, was no longer suitable to the actual state of the language; it is at any rate certain that his more serious compositions in this style are utterly void of harmony. On the other hand, his short verses, which are characteristic of his genius, though affording a very proper vehicle for his low burlesque conceptions, are poured forth extemporaneously without any attempt at rhythmical balance. A flash of thought seems to provoke caprices of rhyme, and one rhyme is tumbled upon another, often with very little regard to sense, until the poet's fancy, unfettered by form and order, lights haphazard on some fresh combination of sound. Every movement is rude, anarchical, arbitrary, the work of a man who feels that the time-honoured metrical instrument is no longer adequate for the expression of his ideas, and who throws it aside because he wants faith and patience to adapt it to the new condition of things. The following extract, setting forth the purpose of *Colin Clout*, may be taken as a type of Skeltonical verse:—

But if ye stand in doute
What brought this rhyme aboute,
My name is Colin Cloute.
I purpose to shake oute
All my connyng bagge,
Lyke a clerkely hagge;
For though my ryme be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rayne-beaten,
Rusty and moughte-eaten,
If ye take well therewith,
It hath in it some pyth.
For as farre as I can se,
It is wrong with eche degre:
For the temporalte
Accuseth the spiritualte;
The spiritual agayne
Doth grudge and complayne
Upon the temporal men:
Thus eche of other blother,
The tone agayng the tother.
Alas! they make me shoder
For in noder moder

The Church is put in faute;
The prelates ben so haute,
They say and loke so hy,
As though they wolde fly
Above the starry skye.

Alexander Barclay, the last of the purely mediæval English allegorists, was in all respects the opposite of Skelton, whom he more than once satirises in his verse.[1] A monk and a moralist, he may have been scandalised at Skelton's offences against decency in word and deed; he was no doubt incensed by his attacks upon his own order. He himself was born in Scotland about 1476, but crossed the Border to complete his education at one of the English universities, probably Cambridge; after which, as he tells us in one of his *Eclogues*, he travelled on the Continent. In the early years of the sixteenth century he was chaplain in the Monastery of St. Mary Ottery, Devonshire, and here, in 1508, he translated Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools*. His *Eclogues* were written in all probability about 1514; and in 1520 he was summoned to France to devise "histories" for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. After leaving the Monastery of Ottery St. Mary's in 1511, he seems to have become a monk of the Order of St. Benedict at Ely. He afterwards entered the Franciscan convent at Canterbury, where he remained till the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. In 1546 he became vicar of Much Badew in Essex, and of St. Matthew at Wokey, Somerset. Appointed rector of All Hallows, Lombard Street, on the 30th April 1552, he had scarcely time to enter on his new duties when he died on the 10th of June in the same year, and was buried at Croydon in the neighbourhood of which he had lived during his early manhood.[2]

Barclay is a writer of little originality. Almost all his extant works are translations or adaptations of other

[1] See *Eclogue* iv., in which he calls him a "graduate" of "Stinking Thais"; and the last stanza of *The Ship of Fools*.

[2] A notice of Barclay's life by T. H. Jamieson was published in 1874. His writings have not been published in a collected form, but an edition of *The Ship of Fools* by Jamieson was issued in 1874.

men's inventions. His first undertaking was a translation of Pierre Gringoire's *Château de Labour*, made in 1506, in which he simply followed his author's text. In the *Ship of Fools* he allowed himself more latitude. His original, Sebastian Brandt's *Stultifera Navis*, was one of those works which are produced only in the decline of a great system of human thought. Except that it is written in the dialect of Suabia, there is nothing in its conception and execution to show that the author was of any particular nation. It is as comprehensive in its view of humanity as the *Inferno* itself; and its scholastic classification of the various kinds of folly is based upon the methods recognised in the encyclopædic education of the Church. All sorts and conditions of men are touched by the satire, so that, as far as the subject goes, the poem is of universal interest. But in respect of poetical treatment Brandt and Dante cannot be named together. The invention shown in *Stultifera Navis* is of the poorest. Intent upon a commonplace moral, the author, having once conceived the idea of separating fools into distinct classes and putting them on board ship for exportation, takes no trouble to give his allegory any further development, and says nothing of the different countries to which the passengers are bound. Nevertheless the matter of the book—the first original work of importance issued from the German press—and the numerous and humorous engravings by which it was illustrated, secured for it a vast audience. It had been translated into most European languages before Barclay introduced it to English readers; and his announcement of the purpose of his translation shows that he expected to hit the taste of a circle much wider than that which was usually interested in the romances and allegories of the time:—

> My speche is rude, my termes comon and rurale,
> And I for rude peple moche more convenient,
> Than for estates, learned men, or eloquent.

In order to flavour his poem, Barclay aimed rather at paraphrase than literal reproduction, and made additions

at will, enlivening his descriptions with touches of local and personal colour, and his morality with a large collection of English proverbs. Hence, while his work as a whole is now quite unreadable, it is not without value for the antiquary.

There is more life in his *Eclogues*. Since the days of Virgil the pastoral dialogue, invented by Theocritus, had been employed for the purposes of literary allegory. Under the disguise of shepherds, Virgil made delicate complimentary allusions to his own contemporaries, and his successors Calpurnius and Nemesianus improved his device into grosser forms of flattery. In later times ecclesiastics, like Mantuan, influenced by the spirit of the Renaissance, converted the artificial *naïveté* of Virgil's rustics to moral purposes, and made the eclogue an instrument for satirising the manners of the court or the city. Barclay had the merit of perceiving that the vein of thought running through these Latin compositions might be reproduced in the vulgar tongue. A monk, a scholar, and a moralist, devoted to the service of the Church, he felt instinctively that, in the great change which was transforming society, the court was "the enemy." While in his pastoral poems he appears to be simply rehearsing the debates of shepherds, he is in reality contrasting the conflicting standards of civil and monastic life. The first three Eclogues, adapted from the *Miseriæ Curialium* of Æneas Silvius, are occupied with a discussion between Corydon, a young shepherd who, dissatisfied with his lot, proposes to seek his fortunes at court, and Cornix, his senior, who dissuades him from his purpose by a recital of his own experience. The picture which the latter draws of the contemporary life of courts is extremely interesting, but the main intention of the poet is shown in such passages as the following :—

> But of our purpose now for to speake agayne,
> Few princes give that to which them selfe attayne.
> Trust me, Corydon, I tell thee by my soule,
> They robbe Saint Peter therwith to cloth Saint Powle.
> And like as dayly we both may see and here,

Some pill[1] the churche, therewith to leade the quere.
While men promoted by such rapine are glad,
The wretches pilled mourne, and be wo and sad.

These covetous aims, says the poet, are contrary to the spirit of Christianity :—

Thus ought we to live as having all in store,
But nought possessing, or caring nought therefore,
What should christen men seeke farther for richesse?
Having food and cloth it is ynough doubtlesse,
And these may our lord give unto us truely,
Without princes service or courtly misery.

In the course of the debate he takes occasion to pay high compliments to "Shepherd Morton," Archbishop of Canterbury in the reigns of Richard III. and Henry VII., and to Alcock, Bishop of Ely, his own diocesan. The Fourth Eclogue, adapted from Mantuan, rehearsing a dialogue between Codrus, a rich shepherd, and Menalcas, who has the gift of poetry, treats of "the behaviour of riche men agaynst poets." This gives Barclay the opportunity for a bitter attack on Skelton, whom he accuses of pandering to the depraved tastes of the court.[2] In the same Eclogue he inserts, after Virgil's manner, an elegy in praise of Sir Edward Howard, Lord High Admiral, second son of the Duke of Norfolk,[3] who in 1513 was killed in an attack on the French fleet in the harbour of Brest. The Fifth Eclogue contains a debate between Amyntas and Faustus, in which the interlocutors balance against each other, in true scholastic fashion, the respective advantages of city and country life. It is needless to say that Faustus, the champion of the rural or monastic side of the argument, has much the better of the encounter. He concludes with a moral full of Virgilian pessimism, and very characteristic of Catholic sentiment :—

[1] Plunder.

[2] Another thing is yet greatly more damnable,
Of rascolde poetes yet is a shamfull rable,
Which voide of wisdome presumeth to indite,
Though they have scantly the cunning of a snite [snipe],
And to what vices that princes most intende,
That dare these fooles solemnize and commende.

[3] Warton says wrongly that the elegy was in honour of the Duke of Norfolk, who survived his son several years.

Alas ! Amyntas, nought bideth that is good,
No, not my cokers, my tabert,[1] nor my hood ;
All is consumed, all spent and worne be,
So is all goodnesse and welthe of the cyté.
The temples pylled dothe bytterly complayne,
Poore people wayleth, and cal for helpe in vayne ;
Poore wydous sorowe, and chyldren fatherles
In vayne bewayleth, whan wolves them oppresse.
Syn hath no scourge and vertu no rewarde,
Who loveth wisdom his fortune is but harde !
Counceyll and cunnyng now tombles in the dust :
But what is the cause ? lawe tourned is to lust :
Lust standeth in stede of lawe and of justyce ;
Whereby good lyvynge subdued is by vyce.

This is the predominant note in Barclay's *Eclogues:* the bucolic style is adopted by him merely as the vehicle of a moral allegory. Of that more poetical form of allegory in pastoral compositions (examples of which are found in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, and even in Gavin Douglas's *Prologues*) whereby the varying aspects of external nature are made to reflect the changes of human life, no traces can be detected in his verse. Nor can he claim any praise as an inventor of metrical harmony. Writing, like Skelton, at a time when Chaucer's system of versification had become inapplicable to the altered conditions of the vocabulary, he shows no sense of the rhythmical changes which were required by the almost total disappearance from the spoken language of the sign of inflection.[2] The extracts which have been made above from his *Eclogues* demonstrate that, so long as his lines contained five accents, he was content, without caring whether the line was measured by an equal number of syllables, or whether the accent fell in its proper place.

From the foregoing account it will be seen that the development of allegory reflects very accurately the internal changes that modified the structure of society and men's system of thought during the fourteenth and fifteenth

[1] No, not my boots, or my smock-frock.

[2] In the extract from the Fifth Eclogue the only words, other than past participles in *ed*, in which the inflected syllable is not suppressed, are "wolvës," "wornë." Even the *e* of the past participles is sometimes suppressed, as in "pyll'd," "consum'd."

centuries. Allegory, as it was understood and used by Dante, the accepted method of interpreting nature and Scripture, derived from the Platonised theology of the fifth and sixth centuries, and methodised in the system of the Schoolmen, first becomes a mechanical part of poetry, and then slowly falls into disuse, in proportion as the scholastic logic itself gives way before the new experimental tests applied to the interpretation of nature. Allegory again, regarded as a literary form of expression, has its original source in the genius for abstraction peculiar to the Latin language, which encouraged the use of the figure of personification in poetry. In this sphere it enjoyed a longer life than in philosophy. Employed by Christian writers like Prudentius, and by Platonic philosophers in favour with the Church, such as Martianus Capella and Boethius, it grew, in the Middle Ages, into a stereotyped form of composition in consequence of the vast popularity of the *Romance of the Rose;* while the tendency to multiply abstract personages was increased by the study of the Latin poets, and particularly Ovid. Lastly, the habit, common to the mediæval poets, of inventing allegories, in which all these abstract personages should be grouped round the central figure of Love, had, doubtless, its far-off origin in the metaphysical conception of Eros pervading the Platonic philosophy. Translated in the sixth century into semi-theological language, through the writings of the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite, which were made generally known to Western Europe by Scotus Erigena in the ninth century, this conception of Love afterwards took form in the *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum* of St. Bonaventura, and through this channel became one of the inspiring sources of the *Vita Nuova* and *Paradiso* of Dante. A stream of kindred sentiment, springing from the same source, coloured the whole code of chivalrous manners; and, from the new impulse thus given to the ancient Teutonic reverence for women, the troubadours, by the aid of Ovid and of models borrowed from the Arabs, developed the elaborate system of Provençal love poetry. The lyrical fervour of the Provençals, in the cooling

atmosphere of the times, gradually became in its turn conventional and didactic ; and the long series of allegories following the *Romance of the Rose* is mainly interesting as marking the fall of temperature in the institutions of chivalry. In the tide of symbolism itself, however, there is at present no ebb. While the genius of the troubadour declines, together with the enthusiasm of the monk, allegorical matter receives an infusion of fresh life from the rationalising tendencies of the Renaissance, and allegorical form is enriched by contributions from moralities, masks, and pageants, the chief entertainments of the court, and by the imagery of the classic pastoral.

# CHAPTER X

## THE RISE OF THE DRAMA IN ENGLAND

THERE is a close and intimate connection between the progress of allegory and the rise of the drama in England. Religious in its primitive character, the drama was the product of the allegorical interpretation of nature sanctioned by Christian theology; didactic in its original purpose, its development was largely due to the principle of personification, which, in the scholastic atmosphere of the times, propagated its species with such surprising fertility. Both in its theological beginnings and its didactic aim, the history of the English drama offers a striking parallel to the growth of the Attic stage, and shows how general are the laws which govern the course of the human imagination.[1]

Two conditions seem to be indispensable to the rise of a great national theatre: on the one hand, a widespread religious belief, accompanied by splendour of religious ritual; on the other, flexibility of imagination, enabling the dramatist to give form, life, and individuality to the floating conceptions of the people. Both requirements were satisfied by Athenian genius; and Attic tragedy and comedy were the joint products of the religious spectacle of the Dionysia, and the succession of great inventors who interpreted the feelings of the spectators. The Romans, who had all the religious feelings and the religious ritual required for the production of the drama, lacked

[1] For details as to the history of the drama, the reader will do well to refer to the well-known histories of Collier and Ward, and to Mr. A. W. Pollard's *English Miracle Plays, Moralities, and Interludes*, which has an excellent Preface.

artistic imagination. Formalists, lovers of abstraction, suppressing individual character in the cause of the State, they were unable to evolve from their indigenous customs that free conception of human action which gives birth to interesting dramatic situations. They admired the Greek drama without the power of emulating it, and, when their liberties were lost in the Empire, their dramatic sense could only be satisfied with spectacles of the most brutal materialism.

Hence, when society was reorganised on Christian principles, the stage, unencumbered by even a decaying theatrical tradition, was free for the production of a completely fresh dramatic type. Slowly and without artistic purpose, just as had been the case in Attica, the outlines of the new form began to disclose themselves. Its birth was due to the necessities of the Church, and its history illustrates the change in the character of dramatic action accomplished by the Christian interpretation of nature. The starting point of the modern drama is the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, regarded not simply as a miraculous fact, but as the central doctrine of the Christian faith, the crowning act in the scheme of Redemption, on which depended the future happiness or misery of every member of the human race. It had been the endeavour of the Christian clergy, from the earliest times, to bring home the reality of this cardinal event to the worshipper by means of the senses as well as of the reason. In the Easter services of the Church it was commemorated in the *Sepulchri Officium*, a solemn rite, in which the cross was buried and afterwards disinterred before the eyes of the congregation. From this mute symbolism the clergy passed to an actual representation, during the service, of the incidents connected with the Resurrection. After the Third Lesson on Easter Sunday there was a procession to the choir, in which was enacted a colloquy between the apostles and the holy women, the opening of which ran as follows :—

APOSTOLI—Dic nobis, Maria,
Quid vidisti in viâ.

PRIMA MARIA—Sepulcrum Christi viventis,
Et gloriam resurgentis.

SECUNDA MARIA—Angelicos testes,
Sudarium et vestes.

TERTIA MARIA—Surrexit Christus, spes mea,
Præcedit nos in Galilæam.

Dialogue of this kind naturally prepared the way for the representation in church of the whole drama of the Resurrection; and a play on the subject, evidently composed for the purpose of being performed during an interval of the service, is preserved in the library at Orleans. It must have been written before 1200, and no doubt followed some ancient model, for Miracle Plays in Latin of a much earlier date are extant, composed by one Hilarius, on the subjects of the History of Daniel, the Raising of Lazarus, and a miracle of St. Nicholas.

Dramatic instinct naturally led to the selection of themes for representation from the New as well as from the Old Testament; and prompted the dramatist to look for materials in the lives and actions of the saints. The earliest miracle play mentioned in England was the work of Geoffrey, afterwards Abbot of St. Albans, who composed it at Dunstable in honour of St. Katherine, probably before the close of the eleventh century; and before the end of the following century these performances must have become widely popular, for William Fitz Stephen, writing about 1182, contrasts the miracle plays exhibited in London with the spectacles of ancient Rome. For a long time the clergy, being able to keep the management of these dramas in their own hands, were favourable to their performance. In course of time, however, they came to view the religious dramas with mixed feelings. A passage from Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* shows that, in the first years of the fourteenth century, permission for the faithful to witness Miracle Plays was guarded with strict limitations:

Hyt ys forebode yn the decre
Miracles for to make or se.
For miracles, yf you begynne,
Hyt is a gaderynt, a syght of synne.

He may yn the Cherche, thurgh thys resun,
Pley the resurrecyon ;
That is to seye, how God ros,
God and man yn myght and los,
To make be yn beleve gode,
That he ros with flesshe and blode,
And he may pleye withouten plyght,
How God yn thole nyght
To make men to beleve stedfastly
That he lyght in the virgyne Mary
Yf thou do hyt in weyis or grenys
A syght of synne truly hyt semys.

From this we may see, first, how strictly didactic was the original purpose of these plays, and next that they were beginning to pass out of the hands of those who held themselves the only authoritative teachers of the people. By degrees the dramatic desire of making the exhibition as real and lifelike as possible prevailed over the symbolical motive ; and when this point was reached the stage requirements became so numerous, that the play could no longer be conveniently combined with the service in church. The performance was accordingly shifted to the churchyard ; but here the multitude of spectators led to the desecration of the graves. Another migration therefore took place, and finally the stage was pitched, as Robert of Brunne shows us, on the green, or some open place in the neighbourhood of the town, where the play was no longer under the direction of the clergy. It is possible that the opposition of the latter might have led to the suppression of the miracles, if it had not been for the decree of the Council of Vienne in 1311, reviving the observance of the Feast of Corpus Christi, instituted by Pope Urban in 1264. This festival now became as popular and as splendid as the Dionysia at Athens ; for, as the exhibition of miracles was the favourite form of public amusement, the trade gilds throughout the country spared neither time nor money to celebrate their holiday in a manner worthy of the occasion. Certain districts gained celebrity for the zeal and efficiency of their performance : York, Wakefield, and Chester[1] in the North,

[1] The representation of the Chester Mysteries was at Whitsuntide.

and Coventry in the Midlands, were the chief centres of attraction; and, from the literary monuments these places have bequeathed to us, we are fortunately able to form a very complete picture of the rude beginnings of the English stage.

The order of the play was regulated by the municipal authorities of the district. When the day of the feast, the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, approached, the mayor, as representing the king, made a proclamation, directing that all persons, with certain privileged exceptions, should attend at the exhibition without arms; that the performance should take place at the particular stations appointed, and nowhere else; that only well-qualified actors should be allowed to play; and that all players should be in their places, and ready to begin, by the hour named in the proclamation. The arrangements were left to the management of pageant masters, appointed by each of the gilds taking part in the performance, who were charged with the duty of choosing the actors, assigning the parts, and collecting from the craftsmen the money required to defray the expenses.

The subject of the play was the whole scheme of Redemption, from the Creation of the World to the Day of Judgment, and this had to be distributed into as many episodes as there were gilds sharing in the representation. Thus, in the surviving York Mystery, there are 48 different scenes, each of which is played by a separate gild; in the so-called Towneley Mystery, 30; in the Coventry Mystery, 42; and in the Chester Mystery, 25. From the close correspondence, in the distribution of the subject, that exists between the various cycles, it is plain that they must all have followed some archetype, which we may assume to have been drawn up with the sanction of the Church.

Assembling in the early hours, when the days were longest, the players, following the order prescribed by the authorities, set the first pageant in the place appointed for it, and, when it was ended, wheeled it away to another station, leaving its place to be occupied by the second; so

that, in this way, the whole drama of the Christian faith was enacted in successive scenes before the spectators in every part of the town. The stage consisted of a scaffold of two stories, the lower being used as the robing room for the players, the upper being open for the representation of the play. When the actors in this rude theatre had performed the part allotted to them, they sent word to those who were to follow them, and the audience waited patiently while another gild, without hurry or confusion, brought up along the prescribed line of march the next act in the drama. The constant circulation of the pageants, the fluctuating crowds, the excitement of expectation, the varied episodes of the play, the richness of the dresses, the emulation of the actors, all blended with the wonder, the enthusiasm, and the devotional feeling of the spectators, must have rendered the feasts of Corpus Christi and Whitsuntide memorable events in the life of the people.

Regarded as the germ of the English drama, the Miracle Play, both in its conception and in its technical machinery, bears the clearest marks of its religious origin. Its aim was didactic; its character symbolical. As its main object was to set before the people the meaning of the scheme of Redemption, the dramatist did not hesitate to place upon the stage impersonations of the most abstract conceptions of the mind. God, the nine orders of angels, the devil and his rebel host, were all introduced in the pageants; and the scene-painter did his best to furnish representations of their invisible abodes in heaven and hell. The acts of the Creator on the different days were conveyed to the mind by means of material symbols. Thus, when the separation of light from darkness was to be represented, the stage direction was, "Then shall be shown a painted cloth, that is to say one half white and the other black"; and for the creation of the fowls, "Then shall be secretly thrown into the air little birds flying, and there shall be set down on the ground geese, swans, ducks, cocks, hens, and other birds, with as many strange beasts as can be found." In order that the spectators might conceive the story as a whole, the representation was sometimes

preceded by a Prologue, in which proclamation was made by the sound of a trumpet, or by banner-bearers (*vexillatores*), showing the scenes which would be exhibited by the different gilds. As the whole story of the Redemption had to be represented in one day, it was necessary to compress the action of each of the pageants within narrow limits. This necessity, in days when the art of scene-shifting was unknown, must have taxed the invention of the pageant masters, since actions supposed to occur in different places had sometimes to be performed on the same stage. The effect of this rapid and condensed representation may be judged from the following extract from the *York Mysteries*, in which Pharaoh appears hardening his heart before Moses:

REX. Hopp illa hayle![1]
Now, certis, this is a sotil swayne,
But this boyes sall byde here in our bayle,
For all thair gaudis sall noght tham gayne;[2]
Bot warse, both morne and none,
Sall thei fare for thy sake.
MOYSES. God sende sum vengeance sone,
And on thi werke take wrake.[3]
[*Moses retires: enter Egyptians.*
i. EGIP. Alas! Alas! this lande is lorne,
On lif we may no lenger lende.[4]
ii. EGIP. So grete mysscheffe is made sen morne,
Ther may no medycyne us amende.
CONSOLL. Sir kyng, we banne[5] that we wer borne,
Our blisse is with bales blende.[6]
REX. Why crys you swa, laddis? liste you scorne?
i. EGIP. Sir kyng, slyk[7] care was nevere kende.
Our watir, that was ordand
To men and beestis fudde,[8]
Thurghout al Egipte lande
Is turned to rede blude;
Full ugly and full ill is it,
That was ful faire and fresshe before.
REX. This is grete wondir for to witte,
Of all the werkis that ever wore.
ii. EGIP. Nay, lorde, ther is anothir yitt,

[1] Bless me!
[2] Their tricks shall not avail them.
[3] Vengeance.
[4] We may no longer remain alive.
[5] Curse.
[6] Mixed with evil.
[7] Such.
[8] Food.

That sodenly sewes[1] us ful sore ;
For tadys and frosshis we may not flitte,[2]
Thare venim loses lesse and more.[3]

I. EGIP. Lorde, grete myses,[4] both morn and none,
Bytis us full bittirlye,
And we hope all by done[5]
By Moyses, oure enemy.

I. CONS. Lord, whils we with this menye meve,[6]
Mon never myrthe be us emange.

REX. Go saie we sall no lenger greve ;
But thai sall nevere the tytare[7] gang. [*Aside*]

II. EGIP. Moyses, my lord has grauntyd leve
At lede thy folk to likyng land,[8]
So that we mende of our myscheve.[9]

MOYSES. I wate full wele thar wordes er wrang,
That sall ful sone be sene,
For hardely I hym heete,
And he of malice mene.[10]
Mo mervayles mon he mett.

From this it is plain that the stage direction, "Moses retires,"[11] cannot have had the same effect as "Exit Moses," in the later drama ; but that at this point Moses must have "retired" to seat himself at the far corner of the stage, and that the Egyptians must have carried Pharaoh's message to him, while the king was still before the spectators. It is probable, however, that means were sometimes taken to divide the stage by a partition ; for in a pageant representing the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we find that the scene is "a chamber in Jerusalem ; Mary and the apostles are assembled in it ; the Jews headed by their doctors, are outside." The play represents the apostles conversing together inside the chamber, but the course of this action is at intervals suspended, while the Jews who are listening outside, carry on a dialogue among themselves ; and after the descent of the Holy Spirit (represented it may be presumed by a dove) the apostles

[1] Pursues.
[2] We may not leave the house on account of toads and frogs.
[3] Destroys small and great.
[4] Lice.
[5] We think it is all done.
[6] While we dwell with this people.
[7] The sooner.
[8] To lead thy people out to the Promised Land.
[9] On condition we are relieved of our misfortunes.
[10] I dare swear he is thinking of malice.
[11] This is of course only a modern insertion.

"open the door," and address the Jews.[1] With such slight exceptions, any attempts made to represent scenery on a stage open on every side must have been limited to what was necessary for the purposes of symbolism; in other words, the dramatist was satisfied with such an amount of external action as was required to make his dialogue intelligible to the audience.

From the predominantly symbolical character of the performance, we may see that, without the co-operation of external influences, the growth of the English theatre would have been arrested at a very early stage. On the same day of every year, the same pageant-scaffolds, carefully laid by, were brought out to be redecorated, and the time-honoured text-books were studied by actors, trained to gratify the taste of a popular audience, while the audience itself, with the conservatism of children, eagerly anticipated words and gestures imprinted on the memory by frequent repetition. In this respect a striking parallel and a curious contrast may be noted in the respective histories of the Greek and English drama. Both grew out of the exhibition of a religious ritual; the Attic choregus and the English pageant-master were animated by the same motive; a similar instinct of conservatism in the audience kept the invention of the Athenian dramatist within limits hardly less strict than those which were imposed on the author of the Miracle Play. The larger scope of invention and liberty enjoyed by the Greek arose from the nature of his religion. Though the chorus was originally no more than an assemblage of revellers, met to celebrate symbolically the worship of Dionysus, there was nothing in the rite to forbid the dramatic representation of stories about the god from being associated with hymns sung in his honour. And when the dramatist had once conceived the idea of impersonating a myth about the god before spectators, it was but a step to bring in the whole cycle of legends that made up the religion of the people. Nor was the Greek dramatist fettered in his conception by any system

[1] *York Plays*, edited by L. Toulmin Smith, pp. 465-472.

of dogma beyond the broad outlines of the myth itself. Though instinct, custom, and the traditions of the drama forbade the Athenian tragedian to multiply the number of actors; yet, in the grouping of the incidents of the play round the protagonist, as well as in his relations to the other two actors and to the chorus, there was room for men of original genius to produce an almost endless variety of dramatic combinations. Had no other monument of the Attic stage been preserved to posterity than the myth in which Orestes is the central figure, we might still, from the different ways in which that subject has been handled by Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, obtain an insight into the gradual change of religious thought and feeling which transformed the character of Athenian society between the battle of Marathon and the Sicilian Expedition.

Far different was the position of the dramatist in the English Miracle Plays. He, in the first place, was restricted by the discipline of the Church to the representation of a single theme; in all the four great cycles of religious plays the subject embraces the whole moral history of man between the Creation of the World and the Day of Judgment. And not only so, but, even in the subdivisions of his subject, he was obliged to follow the selection of topics and episodes which had been imposed on him by tradition. Beyond this, he was confined by the necessity of strictly following the text of the canonical or apocryphal Scriptures. Finally, even if he had felt a desire to put his own rendering and interpretation on the materials he dealt with, he would scarcely have dared to do so. The fear of heresy would have caused the authorities in Church and State to repress sternly the aberrations of any dramatist bold enough to take liberties resembling those on which Euripides ventured in his treatment of the national faith.

In spite, however, of the stereotyped lines within which the miracle plays were restricted, the type admitted of certain modifications, which, under favourable conditions, prepared the way for the future development of the English

drama. Two circumstances in particular, of a contrary kind, encouraged the growth of dramatic variety and invention. In the first place, there was a desire to bring home the truth symbolised to the minds of the audience by making the representation as real as possible; and this devotional feeling, joined with the necessity of introducing a very large number of striking episodes and characters, led to the direct imitation of nature. Absolutely devoid of any sense of historical perspective, the dramatist and his audience sought simply to realise the most sublime and sacred scenes of Scripture narrative. They felt no impropriety in impersonating the Deity on the stage; and, unlike the Greeks, were so far from endeavouring to raise the actors above the stature of common life, by dress and machinery, that they introduced the most venerable personages in Scripture story feeling, acting, and speaking in a manner which everybody could understand. The wicked characters in all the plays swear "by Mahound." The shepherds, gazing at the heavenly host at the Nativity, express their feelings by such ejaculations as "We! hudde!" "We! howe!" "We! colle (oh! golly!)."[1] As many of the spectators would not have understood the terms "high priest," Annas and Caiaphas are called "bishops."[2] When Pilate is first approached by the leaders of the Jews he tells them they must bring their cause before him "in parliament."[3] In order to obtain a place for setting up the cross, negotiations have to be entered into with a "squire," who gives a lease of Calvary, but is cheated in the transaction.[4]

From this attention to the dramatic reality of the situation, and the consequent neglect of learned correctness, arose that tradition of *sans gêne*, which is characteristic of the English stage, and which manifests itself in the unconcern with which Shakespeare transforms a Roman into an English crowd, makes Hector quote Aristotle, and places Bohemia, when it suits his purpose, on the shore of the sea. These early dramatists, too, furnished the hints

[1] *York Plays* (L. T. Smith) p. 119.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 261.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 308.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 318.

for all the nameless generic characters, which figure so prominently in Shakespeare's plays. His First and Second Citizens, Carriers, Gentlemen, and Soldiers have all of them prototypes in the pageants of the craftsmen ; and, from the familiar talk by which the actors helped the townsfolk to realise the Scripture narrative, was generalised the style made classical in the mouths of Bottom, Dogberry, and Falstaff. No doubt the interval between the first rude suggestion and the final triumph of creation is immense. The sense of comedy in the miracle plays is most rudimentary, and never advances beyond the exhibition of a type. Every one of the playwrights of the Mysteries knew that his audience would not only permit, but would expect him to crack his joke about Noah's wife, to pile up his vocabulary in representing the vaunts of Herod, and to lighten the atmosphere of gloom and terror surrounding the Crucifixion with a sportive episode between Pilate and his wife Percula. Beyond this unambitious mark he did not attempt to shoot ; nevertheless, even in aiming at this, he was anticipating the principle of the Shakespearian tragi-comedy.

The second tendency which led to the expansion of the drama was of an exactly opposite kind, namely, the impersonation on the stage of abstract ideas and qualities. In course of time the stage was invaded by the literary taste for allegory ; and allegorical *dramatis personæ* found their way into the Miracle Play. The next step was to engage these symbolical beings in an action by themselves ; and the result of this new invention was the Morality. Much less dramatic in spirit than the miracle plays, the Moralities, nevertheless, mark a stage in the evolution of the drama ; for, in the Morality, the dramatist, no longer able to rely on the narrative of Scripture, was forced to invent his own plot, and, looking for models to the plays of Plautus and Terence, learned how to make the plot turn on the human interest of the situation. As the initial stage in this gradual evolution is very plainly shown in the successive cycles of the York, Towneley, and Coventry Miracle Plays, I propose to take the first as an example of the normal

type of Mystery ; the second as illustrating the tendency of the imitative or comic element in the play to predominate over the symbolical ; and the third as indicating the mode of transition from Miracles to Moralities.[1] The Chester cycle, which is, relatively speaking, deficient in individual character, need not be taken into account.

We find, in the first place, that there is not only a complete resemblance between all the cycles in their general framework, but also that, in each of them, the same range of subjects from the Old Testament is selected for representation. The episodes chosen from this part of Scripture are the Creation and Fall of Man, the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel, the Flood, Abraham's Sacrifice, and the Departure of the Israelites from Egypt.[2] This selection is evidently made for the purpose of symbolism, the prime intention of the dramatist being to illustrate from the narrative of the Old Testament the nature and effects of sin, as rendering necessary the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and also to set forth the types of the coming of the Messiah. In the York Mysteries the playwright, never losing sight of the doctrinal object of the whole scheme, has employed his dramatic powers to bring this out into just relief. His treatment of Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac, for example, shows that he intended to make the behaviour of Isaac a vivid type of the self-sacrifice of Christ. When Abraham announces to his son that he is to be the victim, there is no attempt on the part of the latter to thwart his father's will :—

ISAAC. But, fadir, now wolde I frayne[3] full fayne
Whar-of oure offerand shulde be grathed ?[4]
ABRAHAM. Sertis, sone, I may no longer layne ;[5]
Thy-selfe shulde bide that buter brayde.[6]

[1] For the *York Plays* see the admirable edition by Miss Lucy Toulmin Smith (1885) ; the *Towneley Mysteries*, edited by Mr. J. Raine for the Surtees Society (1836) ; and the *Ludus Coventriæ*, edited by Mr. J. O. Halliwell for the Shakespeare Society (1841).

[2] The main variations from this scheme are the substitution in the Coventry Mysteries of Moses and the Two Tables of the Law, and, in the Chester Mysteries, of Balaam and his Ass, for the Departure of the Israelites from Egypt.

[3] Ask. [4] Prepared. [5] Deceive. [6] Bitter blow.

ISAAC. Why, fadir, wil God that I be slayne?
ABRAHAM. Ya, suthly, sone, so has he saide.
ISAAC. And I sall noght grouche ther agayne;
To werke his wil I am wel payed;[1]
Sen it is his desire,
I sall be bayne[2] to be
Brittynd and brent[3] in fyre,
And ther-fore morne noght for me.

Again, in the representation of the Deluge, advantage is taken of a time-honoured custom to make fun of Noah's wife; but on the whole the merriment is kept within bounds, and the scene of the flood is worked up to its proper symbolical climax. Noah's second son asks:—

Sir, nowe sen god, oure soverand sire,
Has sette his syne thus in certayne,
Than may we wytte this worldis empire
Shall evermore last, is noght to layne.[4]
NOAH. Nay, sonne, that sall we nought desire,
For and we do, we wirke in wane;[5]
For it sall ones be waste with fyre,
And never worthe to worlde agayne.[6]

Yet while thus always keeping in view the religious end of the play, the dramatist of this cycle shows himself a man of very considerable imaginative powers, which he exerts to the uttermost where he perceives that the emotions of the spectators can be properly heightened by the introduction of exciting incidents and stage effects. His arrangement of the series of scenes representing the Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus is, in its rude way, a masterpiece; and the skilful use made of the slight mention in the Gospel of Pilate's wife's dream, displays invention of a high order. As the death of Christ was necessary for man's redemption, the author felt that he must represent the interest of Satan to lie in preventing this death; and accordingly the dream of Pilate's wife became a necessary part of the action of his play. How vividly he conceived the situation may be judged from the following striking scene.—

[1] Pleased. [2] Obedient. [3] To be cut up and burned.
[4] Then may we know it is certain that this world's empire shall last for ever. [5] In vain. [6] And never become world again.

SCENE II. Chamber of Dame PERCULA, Pilate's Wife.

DOM. Nowe are we at home, do helpe yf ye may.
For I will make me redye and rayke to my reste.[1]
ANCILLA. Ye are werie, madame, for-wente of youre way:[2]
Do boune[3] you to bedde, for that holde I beste.
FILIUS. Here is a bedde arayed of the beste.
DOM. Do happe me,[4] and faste hense ye hye.
ANC. Madame, anone all dewly is dressed.
FIL. With no stalking nor no stryffe be ye stressed.[5]
DOM. Now be ye in pese, both youre carpyng and crye.[6]

(*All sleep, enter* SATAN.)

DIABOLUS. Owte! owte! harrowe! in-to bale am I brought.
This bargayne may I banne,
But yf I wirke some wyle, in wo mon I wonne.
This gentleman, Jesu, of cursednesse he can,
Be any sygne that I see, this same is Goddis sonne.
And he be slone our solace will sese.
He will save man saule fro our sonde,
And refe us the remys that are rounde.
I will on stiffely in this stounde
Unto Sir Pilate wiffe, pertely, and putte me in presse.
[*Whispers to* PERCULA.
O woman! be wise and ware, and wonne in thi witte,
Ther shall a gentilman, Jesu, un-justely be juged
Before thi husband in haste, and with harlottis be hytte.
And that doughty to-day to deth thus be dyghted,
Sir Pilate, for his prechyng, and thou
With nede shall ye namely be noyed,
Your striffe and your strengthe shall be stroyed,
Your richesse shall be refte you that is rude
With vengeance and that dare I avowe.[7]
[PERCULA *awakes, starting.*

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[1] Go to my rest.
[2] Over-done with your journey.
[3] Make you ready.
[4] Wrap me up.
[5] May you be disturbed by no walking about or quarrelling.
[6] Peace both to your talking and crying.
[7] In this speech, as indeed in many others through the play, it is evident that the requirements of metrical composition imposed on the dramatist a task beyond the limits of his vocabulary. In finding rhymes and alliterations he often sacrifices sense to sound. The text may be paraphrased: "Alas! alas! woe's me! I am brought to ruin. My curse on this business, for without some crafty device I must abide in misery. This gentleman, Jesus, knows so much craft: by every sign that I see this same is God's son. If he be slain our hope is at an end. He will save man's soul from our power, and deprive us of the kingdoms round us. I will now push on stiffly to Sir Pilate's wife, and get close to her [whispers to Percula].

DOM. A! I am drecchid[1] with a dreme full dredfully to dowte,[2]
Say, childe! rise uppe radly,[3] and reste for no roo;[4]
Thow muste launce[5] to my lorde and lowly hym lowte,[6]
Comaunde me to his reverence, as right will y doo.

FIL. O! what! shall I travayle thus tymely this tyde?[7]
Madame, for the drecchyng of heven,[8]
Slyke note is newsome to neven,
And it neghes unto mydnight full even.[9]

DOM. Go bitte,[10] boy, I bidde no longer thou byde,
And saie to my sovereyne this same is soth that I send hym.
All naked this nyght as I napped,
With tene and with trayne was I trapped
With a swevene that swiftly me swapped,[11]
Of one Jesu, the juste man the Jewes will undoo;
She prayes[12] tente to that trewe man, with tyne be not trapped,
But als a domes man dewly to be dressand,
And lely delyvere that lede.[13]

FIL. Madame, I am dressid to that dede;
But firste will I nappe in this nede,
For he has mystir of a morne slepe that mydnyght is myssand.[14]

The agony of the Crucifixion is represented with such minute attention to technical detail, as would be likely to raise a vivid conception of physical suffering in the minds of men mostly engaged in manual crafts; and the patient silence of the Saviour is contrasted with rude dialogue like the following:—

O woman! be wise and wary and have your wits about you. There is a gentleman, Jesus, about to be unjustly judged in haste before your husband, and to be injured by scoundrels. If that good man be condemned to death to-day, Sir Pilate and you will be hard put to it: your power will be destroyed, your riches taken from you, and vengeance will fall upon you; and that I dare swear."

[1] Tormented. [2] That makes me dreadfully afraid. [3] Quickly.
[4] Pause for no rest. [5] Hasten. [6] Reverence.
[7] Shall I work at this early hour? [8] By God's passion.
[9] This business is annoying to speak of, and it is now close upon midnight. [10] Away!
[11] As I slept naked this night I was pinched with sorrow and craft by a dream that struck me quickly.
[12] A sudden change to the *oratio obliqua*.
[13] Take heed to that just man; be not snared vexatiously, but be duly prepared to act as a judge, and loyally deliver that man.
[14] He has need of sleep in the morning that has missed it at night.

iii. MILES. Owe, lifte! [*They take up the cross again.*]
i. MILES. We loo!
iv. MILES. A litil more.
ii. MIL. Holde thanne!
i. MIL. How nowe!
ii. MIL. The werste is paste.
iii. MIL. He weighs a wikkid weght.
ii. MIL. So may we all foure saie,
Or he was heved on heght,
And raysed in this array.
iv. MIL. He made us stande as any stones,
So boustous[1] was he for to bere.
i. MIL. Now raise hym nemely[2] for the nonys,
And sette hym be this mortas[3] heere;
And latte hym falle in alle at ones,
For certis that payne shall have no pere.[4]
iii. MIL. Heve uppe!
iv. MIL. Latte doune so all his bones
Are a-soundre nowe on sides seere.[5]
i. MIL. This fallyng was more felle
Than all the harms he hadde.[6]
Now may a man wel telle
The leste lith[7] of this ladde.
iii. MIL. Me thynkith this crosse will noght abide,
Ne stande stille in this morteyse yitt.
iv. MIL. Att the firste tyme was it made overe wyde.
That makis it wave,[8] thou may wele witte.
i. MIL. Itt schall be sette on ilke a side
So that it schall no forther flitte.[9]
Goode wegges[10] schale we take this tyde,
And feste the foote, thanne is all fitte.
i. MIL. Here are wegges arraied
For that, both grete and small.
iii. MIL. Where are our hameres laide,
That we schulde wirke withal?
iv. MIL. We have them here even atte our hands.
ii. MIL. Gyffe me this wegge, I schall it in drive.
iv. MIL. Here is anodir yitt ordande.
iii. MIL. Do take it me hidir belyve.[11]
i. MIL. Laye on thanne faste.

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[1] Huge. [2] Quickly. [3] Mortice.
[4] For certainly that pain will be unequalled.
[5] Are now racked asunder in every direction.
[6] This jolt was more horrible than all the hurts he had before.
[7] The least joint.—No doubt the word is an error for "litht."
[8] Makes the cross unsteady.
[9] We will put something on each side to prevent it moving more.
[10] Wedges. [11] Give it me here quickly.

iii. MIL. Yis, I warrande.
I thryng thame same,[1] so motte I thryve.
Now will this crosse full stabely stande,
All if he rave thei will noght ryve.

The Towneley play shows a spirit of an entirely different kind. In this cycle, which appears to have been composed at a later date than the York Mystery, the symbolical purpose recedes into the background; and the strength of the dramatist is exerted mainly in those episodes in which most scope is given for the imitation of real life. It would indeed almost seem as if the author, in attempting to gratify the taste of his Wakefield audience, had studied the York text, and had deliberately resolved to bring the comic elements of that play into exaggerated relief. The York pageant of the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel introduces a subdued vein of comedy in the person of Brewbarret (Strife-brewer), Cain's servant. This person is apparently introduced in order to exhibit the violent impulses of his master's character, for when he comes on the stage after the death of Abel, Cain, though the other is doing him service, assails him with unmeasured abuse, and then, almost in the same breath, bids him stay and drink with him. In the parallel passage of the Towneley play, we find a "Garcio," named Pyk-harness, but the dramatist has assigned to the character something of the licensed impudence of the slave in the Terentian comedy, and engages him in a dispute with Cain as to the disposal of Abel's body. While the York playwright is content to make Noah's wife abuse her husband for his caution, and bewail the loss of her gossips even when the flood is on the point of sweeping her away, his Wakefield successor actually brings husband and wife to fisticuffs on the stage. The chattering soldiers of the earlier play are, in the Towneley Mystery, transformed into "tormentors," whose brutality and ferocity are represented, if possible, in still more glaring colours. But the most remarkable attempt of the dramatist to enlarge his comic liberties is made in the episode of the Adoration of the Shepherds.

[1] Hammer them together.

Here the York poet, mindful of the didactic aim of the play, shows himself, at the same time, attentive to dramatic propriety, and after introducing his shepherds in the midst of a discussion on the Messianic prophecies, carries them to Bethlehem, when they have seen the vision of angels, on the full tide of rude and pastoral dialogue. But in the Towneley cycle comic instinct has proved too powerful for the taste and perception of the religious playwright. He must needs have a sheep-stealing scene; and accordingly his shepherds are joined in their watch by a certain Mak, who, while his companions sleep, makes off with one of their flock, which he carries home to his wife. Feeling sure that the theft will be discovered, the ingenious pair resolve to dress up the sheep like a new-born baby, and endeavour to elude the search of the shepherds by protesting that the mother and child must not be disturbed. This interlude, which is written with considerable comic humour, is of course entirely out of place.

Equally dramatic, and equally wanting in religious purpose, is the dialogue between Abraham and Isaac in the scene of the Sacrifice. The following passage, strongly contrasting with the spirit of the York play, shows nevertheless with what power the poet had conceived the human side of the situation :—

ABRAHAM. Isaac.
ISAAC. What, sir?
ABRAHAM. Good son, be still.
ISAAC. Fadir!
ABRAHAM. What, son?
ISAAC. Think on thi get;
What have I done?
ABRAHAM. Truly none ille.
ISAAC. And shall I be slayne?
ABRAHAM. So have I het.[1]
ISAAC. Sir, what may helpe?
ABRAHAM. Certis, no skille.
ISAAC. I aske mercy.
ABRAHAM. That may not let.[2]

[1] Promised. [2] Hinder.

ISAAC. When I am deed and closed in claye,
Who shall then be your son?
ABRAHAM. A, Lorde, that I should abide this daye!
ISAAC. Sir, who shall do that I was won?
ABRAHAM. Speak no siche wordes, son, I the pray.
ISAAC. Shall ye me slo?
ABRAHAM. I trow I mon.
Lyg stille, I smytte.
ISAAC. Sir, let me saye.
ABRAHAM. Now, my dere childe, thou may not shon.
ISAAC. The shinyng of youre bright blade
It gars me quake for ferd to die.
ABRAHAM. Therefor groflyng thou shalt be layde,[1]
Then when I stryke thou shalt not se.
ISAAC. What have I done, fadir, what have I sayde?
ABRAHAM. Truly no kyne ille to me.
ISAAC. And thus gyltles shall be arayde?
ABRAHAM. Now, good son, let siche wordes be.
ISAAC. I luf you ay.
ABRAHAM. So do I thee.
ISAAC. Fadir!
ABRAHAM. What, son?
ISAAC. Let now be seyn
For my moder leef.
ABRAHAM. Let be! let be!
It will not help that thou wold meyn;
But lie still till I come to the,
I mys a lytyle thyng I weyn.
He speaks so ruefully to me [*Aside*]
That watir shotes in both min eeyn.
I were lever than all worldly wyn
That I had for hym onys unkynde,
But no defaut I faunde hym in;
I wolde be dede for hym or pynde.
*To slo hym thus I thynk grete syn.*
So ruefulle wordes I with hym fynd;
I am fulle wo that we shulde twyn,
For he will nevir out of my mynd.
What shall I to his moder say?
For where is he tyle? will she spyr.[2]
If I telle her, run away,
Hir answere bese belife, "Nay, sir!"
And I am ferd her for to flay;
I ne wote what I shall telle hir.
He lygs full stille there as he lay,
For to I come he dare not styr.

[1] Thou shalt be laid on thy face. [2] Where is he gone? she will ask.

Though this representation renders with great force the emotions which in such a situation would naturally agitate father and son, it takes no account of Isaac as a type of Christ, or of Abraham as father of the faithful; and indeed the Angel calls to the latter out of heaven at the very moment when he is most in suspense between the conflicting impulses of obedience to the divine will and human affection.

The Coventry cycle exactly reverses the process of the Towneley Mystery. In this play, which was composed probably about the middle of the fifteenth century, the tendency to naturalistic imitation almost entirely disappears. Cain's servant has gone; even Noah's wife has become a respectable and orthodox matron, who impresses upon her husband the necessity of giving their children a sound education :—

I am your wyff, your childeryn these be;
Onto us tweyn it doth longe
Hem to teche in alle degré
Synne to forsaken, and werkys wronge.
Therefore, sere, for love of me,
Enforme hem well evyr amonge,
Synne to forsake and vanyté,
And vertu to ffolwe that thei ffonge.[1]

The Shepherds of the Adoration are scarcely more rustic in their talk than any other persons of the play. There is, however, one remarkable exception to this prevailing didactic tendency. The pageant of the Trial of Joseph and Mary (founded on the *Protevangelium of St. James*), in which Mary's virginity is tested and approved, is evidently suggested by the procedure of the Consistory Courts, and there is an element of comedy in the dialogue. A summoner opens the trial by calling in, to listen to the accusation, an audience, many of whose names recall the persons of Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* :—

Thom Tynkere, and Betrys Belle,
Peyrs Potter, and Whatt at the Welle,
Symme Smalflyth, and Kate Kelle,
And Bertylmew the Bochere.

[1] Strive.

Kytt Cakelere, and Colett Crane,
Gyll Fetise, and fayr Jane,
Powle Pewterere, and Pernell Prane,
And Phelypp the good Flecchere.

The case is heard before a bishop, and the charge is preferred by detractors, of whom the chief are Backbiter and Raise-Slander. Mary's innocence is proved by her drinking of a certain cup, and being able afterwards to go round the altar; while her accusers, in their endeavour to satisfy the same test, fail ignominiously. In every other part of the play, however, it is evident that the motive uppermost in the mind of the dramatist is a desire to instruct the people. The scheme of the performance is announced by three *vexillatores*, or banner-bearers, who are careful to inform the spectators of the meaning of each part, and, in one or two of the pageants, an *expositor*, called *Contemplacio*, addresses the audience in verses like the following:—

CONTEMPLACIO. So freynes and frendys, ye mut alle be gret with gode;
Grace, love, and charyté evyr be you among;
The maydenys sone preserve you that for man deyd on rode;
He that is o God in personys thre, defend you fro your fon.

Be the leve and soferauns of allemythty God,
We intendyn to procede the matere that we lefte the last yere,
Wherefore we beseche yow that your wyllys be good
To kepe the passyon in your minde that xal be shewyd here.

The last yere we shewed here how oure Lord, for love of man,
Cam to the city of Jerusalem mekely his deth to take;
And how he made his mawndé, his body givyng than
To his apostelys ever with us to abydyn for man's sake, etc.

It is a curious illustration of the *naïveté* of the whole performance, that Herod, entering the stage after this exhortation, begins his speech by addressing the spectators: "Now sees of your talkyng and gevyth lordly audience." The moral purpose of the dramatist is very strongly marked in the pageant representing the Slaughter of the Innocents, where, while Herod is making his boasts after the massacre, Mors or Death enters, and there is a stage direction, *Hic dum buccinat Mors interficiat Herodem et duos milites subito, et Diabolus*

*recipiat eos.* Death is not the only abstract character in the play. In the pageant of the Salutation and Conception the first scene is in heaven; the speakers are God the Father, the Virtues, Truth and Righteousness, Mercy and Peace, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit;[1] and after their conference Gabriel is sent to Mary at Nazareth.

From these specimens the reader may form a clear conception of the part played by the Corpus Christi Mysteries in the history of the English drama. Confined within strict limits by their religious origin and symbolical purpose, they nevertheless prepared the way for a larger dramatic development; in the first place, by spreading a taste for theatrical exhibitions among the people; in the second place, by furnishing opportunities, in many of the Scriptural scenes, for the direct imitation of human nature; and in the third place, by importing into the representation foreign materials and characters, which led to the invention of plots beyond the range of Scripture history.

The very gradual steps, by which the secularisation of the drama was effected, are illustrated alike by the structure of the later Miracle Plays, and by the decline of this whole class of play before the growing popularity of the Moralities. A notable feature in the Miracle Plays towards the end of the fifteenth century is the great extension of the comic element. One of the so-called Digby Mysteries,[2] *The Killing of the Children*, for example, is very largely occupied with the feats and speeches of Watkin, Herod's man, a boaster and a coward, who, in one scene, brags to Herod of his exploits, and asks to be dubbed a knight, and, in another, is seized by the bereaved mothers and beaten with their distaffs. *Mary Magdalene*, another play preserved in the same collection, is remarkable for the great number of incidents and persons crowded into it; for the manner in which

[1] This scene is borrowed from Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour*. Compare *Castel of Loue* (Weymouth's edition, 1864), vv. 319-554.

[2] The *Digby Mysteries* are a collection of old plays published by Mr. F. J. Furnivall for the New Shakspere Society (1882). They comprise (1) The Killing of the Children, (2) The Conversion of St. Paul, (3) Mary Magdalene, (4) Christ's Burial and Resurrection.

the supernatural machinery of the older Mysteries is utilised in the development of an action mainly turning on human interests; and also for the prominence of its allegorical characters, among whom are Lechery, Mundus, King of the Flesh, The Seven Deadly Sins, Sensuality, etc. The play opens with a boasting speech (in the traditional style always assigned to the parts of kings and governors) of the Emperor Tiberius; and this is followed by another, almost equally vainglorious, from Syrus or Cyrus, father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who announces his intention of leaving to Lazarus his lordship of Jerusalem, to Mary the castle of Maudeleyn, and to Martha the lands of Bethany. A scene in the Infernal Regions, resembling episodes of a like nature in the Corpus Christi plays, shows the devil and his ministers contriving the corruption of Mary, which is accomplished by a rather subtle device. Syrus dies, and, while Mary is mourning for her father, she is tempted by seven devils, a process which gives rise to a succession of scenes in a tavern, vividly illustrating the manners of the time. Mary's fall is finally brought about by one Curiosity, a court gallant, whose character is closely imitated from real life. After this the course of the play follows the narrative of Scripture, amplified by the subsequent history of the Magdalene, as related in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

Now it is plain that when a single action, not symbolical like the story of Man's Fall and Redemption exhibited in the Corpus Christi plays, could be made the subject of a plot so intricate and extended as that of *Mary Magdalene*, the drama must have reached a point but a little removed from the representation on the stage of fables of simple secular interest. Curiously enough, the link of connection between the later Miracle Plays and the regular drama is found in a class of plays of which the purpose was symbolical, and in which the actors were all abstractions. These were the Moralities. The dramatist perceived that he might avail himself of the allegorical machinery which had long become an established part of

literary composition. Ever since Guillaume de Lorris had shown the way in the *Romance of the Rose*, the clergy had been anxious to convert the popularity of the new style to their own ends; and poems like Robert Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour*, and homilies like *Sawles Warde* remain as monuments of their ingenuity and invention. Between compositions of this kind and the symbolical play there was an obvious analogy, and, as we have seen, the Coventry playwright was the first to transfer, in a modified form, one of the passages in the *Château d'Amour* into his pageant of *The Salutation and Conception*. This step having been taken, it was easy to extend the principle from a single pageant to an entire play, and to conduct an action, didactic in its purpose like that of the Mysteries, but not taken from Scripture, by means solely of abstract personages.

In making this important transition, the dramatists were careful to conform as closely as possible to the models furnished to them in the Miracle Plays. The oldest surviving Moralities are *The Castle of Perseverance; The Wisdom that is Christ; Mankind; The World and the Child; Everyman;* and *Hick Scorner*. All of these, like the Corpus Christi plays, are variations of a single type. In other words, each of them treats, in its own fashion, of one fundamental idea, namely, the struggle between good and evil in human nature; just as in the Mysteries different dramatists handle variously the story of the Fall and Redemption of Man. Like the Mysteries too, though with somewhat more of variety, the Moralities represent the action of the same persons, Lucifer, Mundus, Anima, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Wits, Mankind, etc. The great and essential difference in the constructive principles of the two classes of drama is, that, while the Miracle Play merely exhibits a series of isolated scenes, in illustration of a doctrinal thesis, the Morality works out the purpose of its allegory by means of a continuous plot.

Not only did the authors of the Moralities imitate the Miracle playwrights in the unity of their general conception: they followed them closely in the mechanical

construction of the play. They employed the same kind of pageant, though, as the drama was now performed entirely on one stage, it is probable that more attention began to be given to scene-painting and "the properties," which seem to have been often of a very gorgeous kind. *Vexillatores*, messengers, "doctors," and "expositors," were introduced, as in the older plays, to explain to the audience the meaning and moral of the piece. Even in the natural divisions of the drama there was a strict adherence to the ancient type of action, though a great advance towards unity of construction was made by the introduction of a leading personage, who may be called the hero of the play. For example, *The Castle of Perseverance*, generally supposed to be the oldest, as it is certainly the longest, of the Moralities, represents the varying fortunes of one *Humanum Genus*.[1] The play opens, just like one of the Mysteries, with a pageant showing the conflict between supernatural powers. As the York and the other Corpus Christi plays begin with the Rebellion of the Angels, the Creation of the World, and the Fall of Man, so the *vexillator* in *The Castle of Perseverance* informs the audience that God sends to every man born into the world a good and a bad angel, between whom he is free to make his choice; and the play proceeds to exhibit *Humanum Genus* yielding himself to the guidance of *Malus Angelus*, who is the minister of *Mundus*, *Belial*, and *Caro* (the World, the Devil, and the Flesh). The scenes from the Old Testament in the miracle plays are intended to illustrate the effects of sin, while they also exhibit the means of grace and typify the plan of redemption; and, in the same manner, the scenes in the history of *Humanum Genus* after he has given himself over to *Voluptas* and *Stultitia* (Pleasure and Folly) show the consequences of his bad choice. For a time he finds refuge with the Christian Virtues in the Castle of Perseverance, where he is besieged (the reader will recollect the siege in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*)[2]

[1] Selections from this Morality, which has never been printed, will be found in Mr. A. W. Pollard's *English Miracle Plays, Moralities, and Interludes* (1890), pp. 64-76.

[2] See p. 225.

by Belial and the Seven Deadly Sins; but he is presently seduced by *Avaricia*, who finds his way into the castle, and persuades *Humanum Genus* to leave it; after which the latter goes from bad to worse. Lastly, the closing scenes of the Redemption and the Day of Judgment in the Mysteries furnish the model for the conclusion of the Morality. *Humanum Genus* is about to die, and his soul is being carried away to hell by *Malus Angelus*, when a debate is held in heaven over him between *Justitia*, *Veritas*, *Misericordia*, and *Pax*, in the presence of *Deus Pater* (the scene is borrowed from the Coventry Mystery, which, as I have said, is indebted to the *Château d'Amour*), the result being that *Pax* is sent to rescue the perishing soul, while the Bad Angel is condemned to everlasting fire.

The same fundamental idea, similarly subdivided—Conflict, Fall, Degeneration, Salvation—runs, as has been already said, through the other Moralities that have been mentioned; but it is treated at less length, and generally in such a manner as to bring out some one side of the subject into special prominence. Thus, in the Morality, *The Wisdom that is Christ*, or *Mind, Will, and Understanding*, the special object of the moralist seems to have been to exhibit the sudden transformations of which the human mind is capable. *Anima* or the Soul is represented at the opening as in love with Wisdom, but she is soon corrupted by Mind, Will, and Understanding, who have themselves been perverted by Lucifer. She brings forth six of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the stage direction is "Here rennyt out from under the horribull mantyle of the Soule six small boyes in the lykenes of devyllys, and so returne ageyn." But in the next scene Wisdom re-enters, and *Anima* is at once transfigured: "Here entreth *Anima* with the five wyttes goynge before: Mynde on the onsyde and Understandynge on the other syde, and Wyll following, all in here fyrst clothynge, her chappelets, and crestes, and all havyng on crownys, syngynge in here commynge." Mind, Will, and Understanding announce that they mean to abandon their ways of life, and the play ends with a dance. From the large amount of dumb show, pageantry,

and decoration in this Morality, it would seem as if the spectators were beginning to look rather to the splendour, than to the moral meaning, of the play.[1]

On the other hand, in *The World and the Child*, the idea of gradual degeneration is pursued with great logic and regularity.[2] Mankind here first appears as an infant, to whom his mother gives the name of Dalliance. Beginning in boyhood to come under the rule of *Mundus*, he receives the name of Wanton; passing on to youth he is called Love-lust and Liking; while, after he has come of age, *Mundus*, who is greatly pleased with his progress, tells him that his name shall be henceforth Manhood Mighty. Conscience then appears, and half persuades Manhood to leave the service of *Mundus;* but Manhood halts between two opinions, and shows himself still attached to the service of his old master, in which he finds many advantages:—

> But yet wyll I hym not forsake,
> For mankynde he doth mery make,
> Though the worlde and conscience be at debate,
> Yet the worlde will I not despyse.
> For bothe in chyrche and in chepynge,[3]
> And in other places beynge,
> The worlde fyndeth me al thynge,
> And doth me grete servyse.

To serve God and Mammon, however, is impossible, as Mankind discovers when his name is changed to Age. Then he begins to learn the lessons of Perseverance, from whom he receives his last and best name of Repentance.

It is interesting to observe how the author of this strictly symbolical play seizes, like the Corpus Christi playwrights, on every opportunity he can of making his characters dramatic and lifelike. The dialogue between *Mundus* and Manhood affords a very vivid reflection of the dress, manners, and morals of the time. *Mundus* himself, abstraction as he is, is modelled on the time-honoured type of Herod or Pilate, and emulates those personages in his enormous brags, which are couched in alliterative

[1] An incomplete version of this play is published with the *Digby Mysteries* (Furnivall), pp. 137-168.

[2] This Morality is included in Dodsley's *Collection of Old English Plays* (Hazlitt), vol. i. p. 241.

[3] Market.

verse as in the Coventry Mysteries.[1] The following is an example of his style :—

Lo syrs, I am a prynce peryllous yprovyde ;
I prevyd full peryllous, and pithely I pyght ;
As a lord in eche lond I am belovyd ;
Myne eyen do shyne as a lantern bright.
I am a creature comely out of care ;
Emperors and kynges they knele to my kne ;
Every man is ferde when I do on hym stare, etc.[2]

The speech of Manhood which follows this is in the same vein : he enumerates in a long list the countries he has conquered.

It has been already remarked that what chiefly distinguishes the Morality from the Mystery is the appearance in the former of a connected plot. While the invention of the author of the Morality was limited by his strict adherence to the dramatic type created by the older playwrights, he often showed great architectural ingenuity in utilising his available space. This is particularly the case in the play called *Everyman*, produced in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The names of the *dramatis personæ* are almost sufficient to indicate the nature of the action in this Morality, and its central idea is worked out by means of them with a solemn and truly tragic simplicity worthy of the Greek drama. They are God, Death, Everyman, Fellowship, Kindred, Goods, Good Deeds, Knowledge, Confession, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, Five Wits, Angel, Doctor. God sends Death for Everyman, and he being thrown into great distress by the summons, appeals in turn to Fellowship, Kindred, and Goods, asking them to accompany him into the other world, but, as may be supposed,

[1] *E.g.*—Herodes Rex. I ryde on my rowel ryche in my regne,
Rybbys fful rede with rape xall I sende ;
Poppetys and paphahawkes I xal putten in peyne,
With my spere prevyn, pychin, and to spende.
*Coventry Mystery*, xix.

[2] Compare the speech of Pilate in *York Mystery*, xxxii. (Toulmin Smith's edition, p. 308) :—

I am the luffeliest lappid and laide
With futour full faire in my face,
My forhed both brente is and brade,
And myne eyne thei glittir like the gleme in the glasse.

each of these, while lavish in expressions of regard, begins, when put to the test, to make excuse. At last Everyman falls back on Good Deeds, and, by the help of this personage and the other characters in the drama, is brought to such a state of grace, that, when Death finally comes for him, the Doctor, whose speech closes the play, is enabled to inform the audience of his happy departure. The interest of the piece lies in the piteous appeals made by Everyman to his worldly allies, and in their diplomatic answers. The following extract from the dialogue between Everyman and Goods will show how dramatic is the style, and at the same time how appropriate the allegory of this admirable play :—

EVERYMAN. Where art thou, my Goods and Riches?
GOODS. Who calleth me? Everyman? What hast thou haste?
I lie here in corners trussed and piled so high,
And in chests I am locked so fast,
Also sacked in bags thou mayst see with thine eye,
I cannot stir; in packs lo where I lie.
What would you have? lightly me say.
EVERYMAN. Come hither, Goods, in all the haste thou may,
For of counsel I must desire thee.
GOODS. Sir, and ye in the world have sorrow or adversity,
That can I help you to remedy shortly.
EVERYMAN. It is another disease that greveth me,
In this world it is not I tell thee so,
I am sent for another way to go,
To give a straight account general,
Before the highest Jupiter of all:
And all my life I have had my pleasure in thee,
Therefore I pray thee now go with me;
For, peraventure, thou mayst before God Almighty
My reckoning help to clean and purify;
For it is said ever emong
That money makyth all right that is wrong.
GOODS. Nay, nay, Everyman, I sing another song.
I follow no man in such voyages,
For, and I went with thee,
Thou shouldest fare much the worse for me:
For, because on me thou didst set thy mind,
Thy reckoning I have made blotted and blind,
That thine account thou canst not make truly,
And that hast thou for the love of me.

. . . . .

EVERYMAN. Lo, now was I deceived ere I was ware,
And all I may wete mispending of him.
GOODS. What, wenest thou that I am thine?
EVERYMAN. I had wened so.
GOODS. Nay, Everyman, I say no.
As for a while I was lent thee;
A season thou hast had me in prosperity,
My condition is man's soul to kill;
If I save one, a thousand do I spill.
Wenest thou that I will follow thee?
Nay, not for the world verily.
EVERYMAN. I had wened otherwise.
GOODS. Therefore to thy soul Goods is a thief,
For when thou art dead this is my guise,
Another to deceive in the same wise
As I have do thee, and all to his soul's reprefe
EVERYMAN. O false Goods! cursed may thou be,
Thou traitor to God, thou hast deceived me,
And caught me in thy snare!
GOODS. Marry, thou brought thyself in care,
Whereof I am right glad:
I must needs laugh, I cannot be sad.
EVERYMAN. Ah, Goods! thou hast long had my hearty love
I gave thee that which should have been the Lord's above;
But wilt thou not go with me indeed?
I pray thee truth to say.
GOODS. Nay, so God me speed!
Therefore, farewell, and have good day.[1]

Another very noticeable feature in the Moralities is the tendency of the dramatist to represent real personages under the guise of abstractions. I have already pointed out how Langland was the first to adopt this style of allegory, and we have seen how the author of the Coventry Mystery mixes up real and allegorical personages, in the pageant representing the Trial of Joseph and Mary; even in Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure*, the abstraction, False Report, appears with the name of Godfrey Gobilive. Nowhere, however, is the practice carried to such lengths as in the Morality called *Hick-Scorner*. Here the actors—Pity, Contemplation, Perseverance, Imagination, Free-will, Hick-Scorner himself—

[1] *Everyman*. From Dodsley's *Old Plays* (Hazlitt's edition), vol. i. pp. 117-120. The spelling is of course to some extent modernised in this edition.

are all abstractions, but they speak and behave like persons in real life. Free-will, Imagination, and Hick-Scorner may be described as three "idle apprentices"; and it is plain that the purpose of the Morality is mainly to amuse the spectators with an account of the misdoings of these rogues. Hick-Scorner gives an account of his travels, and gets Pity put into the stocks, but he himself afterwards appears very little in the play, which is mainly occupied with the conversation of Free-will and Imagination. The conventional type of the Morality, of course, required that the bad character should be reformed; hence Free-will is in the end converted by Perseverance and Contemplation, and himself converts Imagination; but what the audience really enjoyed was no doubt dialogue like the following:—

IMAGINATION. But, Freewill, my dear brother,
Saw you nought of Hick-Scorner?
He promised me to come hither.
FREE-WILL. Why, sir, knowest thou him?
IMAGINATION. Yea, yea, man, he is full nigh of my kin,
And in Newgate we dwelled together,
For he and I were both shackled in a fetter.
FREE-WILL. Sir, lay you beneath or on high of the seller?
IMAGINATION. Nay, iwis among the thickest of yeomen of the collar.
FREE-WILL. By God, then were you in great fear.
IMAGINATION. Sir, had I not been two hundred had been thrust in an halter.
FREE-WILL. And what life have they there all that great sort?
IMAGINATION. By God, sir, once a year some taw halts of Burford;
Yea at Tyburn there standeth the great frame,
And some take a fall that maketh their neck lame.
FREE-WILL. Yea, but can they go no more?
IMAGINATION. Oh no, man; the wrest is twist so sore,
For as soon as they have *In manus tuas* once,
By God, their breath is stopped at once.
FREE-WILL. Why, do they pray in that place there?
IMAGINATION. Yea, sir, they stand in great fear,
And so fast tangled in that snare,
It falleth to their lot to have the same share.
FREE-WILL. That is a knavish sight to see them totter on a beam.
IMAGINATION. Sir, the whoresons could not convey[1] clean,
For, and they could have carried by craft as I can,

[1] Steal.

In process of years each of them should be a gentleman.
Yet as for me I was never thief;
If my hands were smitten off, I can steal with my teeth;
For ye know well there is craft in daubing.
I can look in a man's face and pick his purse,
And can tell new tidings that was never true, i-wis,
For my hood is all lined with lesing.[1]

In the curious enigmatical discourse between these two Abstractions on the subject of hanging, we might almost imagine ourselves to be listening to one of those colloquies between persons of low life in which Shakespeare so much delights.

Here I pause in the history of the English drama. We have seen how in the beginning the miracle play was closely connected with the services of the Church, and was developed by the clergy in order to aid the imagination of the worshipper to realise the mysterious truths of the Christian religion; how from the interior of the church the representation passed to the churchyard, and thence to the open spaces near the towns, thus escaping farther and farther from ecclesiastical control; and how at the great feast of Corpus Christi it finally passed into the hands of the trade-gilds, and became the main vehicle of popular urban amusement. Under the new management it naturally took its colour from the taste of the actors and audience, so that its sacred character was curiously blended with imitations of actual nature and with the comedy of low life. On the other hand, on its symbolical side, it gradually allied itself with literature, and modified its form by admitting the action of allegorical personages. From this modification arose a new kind of play, the Morality, in which a symbolical plot was evolved by the action of a number of abstract characters. The transition from the Morality to the later Interlude, and from this to the regular drama, is a subject that must be deferred till the next volume.

[1] *Hick-Scorner.* Dodsley's *Old Plays* (Hazlitt's edition), vol. i. pp. 157-159.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE DECAY OF ENGLISH MINSTRELSY

STRICTLY speaking, a history which is mainly intended to trace the development of literary and dramatic poetry in England from the age of Chaucer is not concerned with the history of oral or ballad poetry. But, as the reader will have already seen, Chaucer's art has its roots in the oral poetry of the trouvères and troubadours; and the ballad made so frequent an appearance in the English drama, and so powerfully influenced the course of metrical composition at the close of the eighteenth century, that the subject is one that cannot be neglected at the point of the narrative to which we have now been brought. In order, therefore, to give a comprehensive view of the relations between English Poetry and English Minstrelsy, and of the manner in which each form of art has been affected by the other, I propose in this chapter to deal with the question as it was first raised by Bishop Percy, in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.*

This famous book, the first edition of which was published in 1765, contained two essays, one on the "History of Minstrelsy," the other on the "Origin of the Metrical Romances," which taken together may be said to furnish the first generalised theory of the nature of mediæval poetry. Concisely stated, the following are Percy's main conclusions on the subject of minstrelsy:—

1. "The minstrels were an ancient order of men who sang to the harp their own compositions."

2. "The minstrels seem to have been the genuine

successors of the ancient bards,"—in which term Percy evidently intended to include the oral poets of all the ancient nations, Celtic, Teutonic, and Scandinavian.

3. "The minstrels" (*i.e.* the Anglo-Saxon minstrels) "continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman Conquest. . . . I have no doubt," says Percy, "but most of the old heroic ballads in this collection were composed by this order of men."

4. "The reader will find that the minstrels continued down to the reign of Elizabeth, in whose time they had lost much of their dignity, and were sinking into contempt and neglect. Yet still they sustained a character far superior to anything we can conceive at present of the singers of old ballads."

As regards the origin of the Romances, Percy's theory is substantially contained in the following passage :—

"As the irruption of the Normans into France under Rollo did not take place till towards the beginning of the tenth century, at which time the scaldic art was arrived to the highest pitch in Rollo's native country, *we can easily trace the descent of the French and English Romances of Chivalry from the Northern sagas.* The Conqueror doubtless carried many scalds with him from the North, who transmitted their skill to their children and successors. These adopting the religion, opinions, and language of the new country, substituted the heroes of Christendom instead of those of their pagan ancestors, and began to celebrate the feats of Charlemagne, Roland, and Oliver ; whose true history they set off and embellished with the scaldic figments of dwarfs, giants, dragons, and enchantments. . . . But this is not all ; it is very certain that both the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks had brought with them, at their first emigrations into Britain and Gaul, the same fondness for the ancient songs of their ancestors which prevailed among the other Gothic tribes, and that all their first annals were transmitted in these popular poems. This fondness they even retained long after their conversion to Christianity, as we learn from the examples of Charlemagne and Alfred. Now, poetry being thus the transmitter of

facts, would as easily learn to blend them with fictions, as she is known to have done in the north, and that much sooner for the reasons before assigned. This, together with the example and influence of the Normans, will easily account to us why the first Romances of Chivalry that appeared both in England and France were composed in metre, as a rude kind of epic songs. In both kingdoms tales in verse were usually sung by minstrels to the harp on festal occasions; and doubtless both nations derived their relish for this sort of entertainment from their Teutonic ancestors, without either of them borrowing it from the other. Among both peoples narrative songs on true or fictitious subjects had evidently obtained from the earliest times. But the professed Romances of Chivalry seem to have been first composed in France where also they had their name."

Percy was a critic of admirable poetical taste and literary skill, but he was not altogether proof against the temptations to which these qualities exposed him. In the collection of ballads which he "edited" from the MS. in his possession, he did not scruple to alter and supplement the original text whenever he thought that by so doing he could improve the general effect. By these practices he roused the wrath of an able and relentless antagonist. Joseph Ritson (born in 1752) possessed all the enthusiasm, and even more than the share of eccentricity, which so often accompanies the genius of the antiquary. A vegetarian on principle, he probably impaired by the strictness with which he carried his faith into practice a constitution which needed to be sustained on a different kind of diet. He adopted, as will presently be seen, a form of orthography peculiar to himself. Violent in all his notions,—religious, moral, and political, as well as critical,—he was always ready to fall upon others whose opinions were at variance with truth, or at least with his own view of it. As his learning was large and generally accurate, and his style incisive, he was respected and disliked; and at different times Warburton, Johnson, Warton, and Steevens all felt the edge of his criticism.

It will readily be supposed that Percy's ideas of the duties of an editor did not commend themselves to Ritson, who, in the Preface to his own *Select Collection of English Songs*, published in 1783, alluded to the Bishop's practices in his usual trenchant fashion :—

"Forgery and imposition of every kind ought to be universally execrated, and never more than when they are employed by persons high in rank and character."

In 1802 Ritson published his *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, and renewed his attacks on Percy and Warton (whose *History of English Poetry* he had previously criticised) in a dissertation, the following extracts from which may provide the reader with some entertainment, and may explain, at the same time, why the strictures of a man so learned as Ritson should have had so little effect on the development of the question we are considering. Of his own book Ritson says :—

"Brought to an end with much industry and more attention, in a continued state of ill-health, and low spirits, the editour abandons it to general censure, with cold indifference, expecting little favour and less profit ; but certain at any rate to be insulted by the malignant and calumnious personalitys of a base and prostitute gang of lurking assassins, who stab in the dark and whose poison'd daggers he has allready experienc'd."[1]

Speaking of an opinion of the historian of English Poetry, he says :—

"In consequence" (the Saxons being an illiterate people) "no romance has yet been discover'd in Saxon, but a prose translation allready notice'd. So that if, as Warton pretends, the flourishing of 'the tales of the Scandinavian scalds' among the Saxons may be justly presume'd, it is certain they had been soon lost, as neither vestige nor notice is preserve'd of them in any ancient writeër, nor in fact would any but a stupid fool, or rank impostor, imagine that any of these supposititious Scandinavian tales existed in the middle of the fifth century when the Saxons first establish'd themselves in Britain."[2]

[1] *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, p. iv. [2] *Ibid.* p. lxxxii.

Ritson having shown in his volume of 1783 that Percy's citations of ancient ballads were not to be relied on, the Bishop, in a new edition of the *Reliques*, professed himself ready to follow any authoritative text, but pretended that Ritson's own text was not trustworthy because, in a single instance, it did not correspond with the MS. Under the circumstances he describes in the following passage, Ritson had some right to be angry; but his manner of venting his indignation was only too characteristic:—

"The Bishop of Dromore (as he now is) on a former occasion haveing himself, as he wel knows, allready falsify'd and corrupted a modern Scottish song, says . . . This, however, is an INFAMOUS LYE; it being much more likely that he himself, who has practise'd every kind of forgery and imposture, had some such end to alter this particular line, with much more violence, and as he himself owns actual 'CORRUPTION,' to give the quotation an air of antiquity, which it was not entitled. The present editour's text is perfectly accurate to a single comma, but 'this line,' as he pretends to apologise for his own, 'being quoted from memory,' haveing frequently heard it so sung in his younger days by a north country blacksmith, without thinking it necessary for the moment to turn to the genuine text, which lay at his elbow, and which his lordship DARE NOT IMPEACH. 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see [more] clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.' Gospel according to S. Matthew, chap. vii. verse 5."[1]

In his own dissertation on the Romances, Ritson admitted the accuracy of Percy's account of the decay of minstrelsy, but denied the correctness of the Bishop's theory as to the origin and development of the art, and he supported his conclusions with great strength of argument and learning. The reading public, however, while much excited by the specimens of ancient poetry which Percy had been the first to reveal to them,

[1] Ritson, *Ancient English Minstrelsy*, p. cxliii.

were only moderately interested in the antiquities connected with the subject, and were therefore surprised at the heat with which the controversy was maintained. Scott, in an article on "Romance," contributed to the Supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, expressed the sum of general opinion on the matter:—"There is so little room for this extreme loss of temper, that upon a recent perusal of both these ingenious essays, we were surprised to find that the reverend editor of the *Reliques* and the accurate antiquary have differed so very little as in essential facts they appear to have done."

Since the beginning of the century numerous collateral points, all more or less connected with the main question raised by Percy,—such as the age of the Icelandic sagas, the age and character of the *Song of Beowulf* and the *Nibelungenlied*, and the sources of ballad poetry,—have engaged the attention of scholars and critics. Philology, comparative mythology, and archæology, have all been employed with great learning and ingenuity to illuminate each specific matter of debate. But the question of greatest interest to the general reader and the literary critic—viz. the true history of the march and movement of poetry—has remained very much in the position in which it was left by Percy, who, secure in the general favour with which his book was received, made no attempt to modify his theory at any of the points against which Ritson had directed his attack. Something has been already said, in the earlier chapters of this history, of the growth of mediæval poetry, but at this stage it will be convenient to consider more fully the changes in the art of minstrelsy, as illustrated (I) by the progress of society from the tribal to the civil state, (II) by the transition from oral to written poetry, (III) by the character of the ballad.

(I) In the early stages of society, before the invention of writing, the art of metrical composition is the only way in which mankind can preserve the memory of things. The bard or minstrel is therefore at once the genealogist, the historian, the theologian of the tribe. He may also in a sense be described as its philosopher, and the songs

of Iopas in the *Æneid* and of the scop in *Beowulf* are types of those primitive speculations on the origin of things, which prepare the way for the metrical treatises of philosophers like Empedocles. It is easy to understand that an art embracing so much science and accomplishment should be regarded as of divine origin; the inspiration of Cædmon is granted to him directly from Heaven, just as it is taken away from Thamyris by the will of the Muses.[1] But as society advances, and the institutions and ideas of men become more settled, the single art of the minstrel begins to branch into a variety of channels, and as soon as the art of writing comes into general use, the productions of the epic, the dramatic, and the lyric poet, of the historian and the philosopher, are separated by natural boundaries, though each still retains some traces of the common oral source. The works of Hesiod, of Simonides, of Pindar, of Æschylus, and even of Herodotus, are all of them the lineal offspring of the minstrelsy of the primitive bard.

In the case of mediæval poetry, the descent, though more complex and irregular, is substantially the same. Percy was amply warranted in concluding that "the minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient bards." Ritson, it is true, positively asserted that "there is no connection, no resemblance between the scalds of Scandinavia and the French minstrels";[2] but setting aside the antecedent improbability that an order of men so distinct as the scôpas and scalds should have utterly disappeared after the barbarian irruption, the direct descent of the jongleurs from the scôpas is proved by evidence with which neither Percy nor Ritson was acquainted. In the Anglo-Saxon *Traveller's Song* the functions and character of the scôpas are thus described: "So through all lands wander the gleemen of men. Always North and South they fall in with some man, knowing in

[1] στεῦτο γὰρ εὐχόμενος νικησέμεν, εἴπερ ἂν αὐταὶ
Μοῦσαι ἀείδοιεν, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
αἱ δὲ χολωσάμεναι πηρὸν θέσαν, αὐτὰρ ἀοιδὴν
θεσπεσίην ἀφέλοντο καὶ ἐκλέλαθον κιθαριστύν.—*Iliad*, ii. 597.

[2] *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, p. xxx.

song, bounteous in gifts, who wishes before his great men to exalt his power and show his dignity, till all vanishes, life and light at once. He who works praise has under heaven enduring glory."[1] It is needless to say that to sing the praises of the great was one of the chief duties of the mediæval minstrel. To cite one instance out of a thousand, John of Salisbury, in the reign of Henry I., writes approvingly to a noble correspondent because "he has not, like the triflers of the age, lavished his wealth on minstrels and mimes and suchlike monsters, in order to purchase fame and the propagation of renown."[2] In the Teutonic or Scandinavian court the accomplished gleeman was rewarded with presents of rings, bracelets, and lands;[3] on the roving minstrel of the Middle Ages who succeeded him were bestowed sumptuous robes, horses, and the favours of ladies;[4] the wandering ballad-singer in the days of Elizabeth, the last survivor of the line, had to content himself with the payment of the conventional groat.[5]

But while the line of succession from scalds to jongleurs and from jongleurs to ballad singers was thus unbroken, the development of the art, or profession, was far more irregular than Percy's description seems to imply. So long as the scald remained in the North, he united in himself the various functions before mentioned, and expressed his thoughts by singing to the accompaniment of a single instrument, the harp. But, when the barbarians overthrew the Roman Empire, tribal institutions were brought into contact with the traditions of civil life, and the lower intellectual equipment of the conquerors gave way before, or sought to assimilate, the system of ancient culture. Their language merged itself in the speech of the subject race; their native religions were suppressed by the victorious advance of Christianity; while, in the resources of civilisation, they found a thousand arts of

[1] *Codex Exoniensis*, pp. 326, 327.
[2] Cited by Du Cange under *Ministelli*. His reference to the letter (247) seems to be incorrect.
[3] Notes 2 and 3, p. 83.
[4] Percy, *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*, Note E.
[5] Wheatley's Preface to *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, p. xxiii.

amusement and interest which before were unknown to them. Under these influences the simple character of the Northern minstrel soon expanded itself, leaving the course of its transformation plainly visible on the surface of language. It was the office of the Teutonic "gleeman" at once to celebrate the great actions of his lord and to amuse his leisure; and it is therefore not surprising to find his name at first translated into Latin as "joculator," and afterwards corrupted into French as "jogleur"; nor to hear of a "jogleur" of the Lombards prophesying victory to Charlemagne on his march into Italy.[1] But our ordinary associations are certainly shocked when we read of martial songs of the same kind being sung by a *scurra* or buffoon;[2] for this can only mean that the gleeman while continuing to sing the ancient tribal "gestes" has begun to amuse his lord by an exhibition of the same kind of tricks as diverted the rich and corrupted Roman. In the same manner the "gestour," or singer of heroic songs, gradually declines into the jester or court fool. Besides, the barbarians found among the Romans a long-established form of amusement provided by the "mimus," who entertained his audience by dumb action. As no word is more frequently used than this by the Latin writers of the Middle Ages to denote the minstrel class, we may infer that the arts of the mime were imitated by some of the gleemen. This would have naturally led to a separation between the offices of the singer and the harper, hitherto combined in the single person of the Teutonic minstrel; hence in the laws of James II., king of Majorca, provision is made for the engagement in the service of the palace of five mimes, of whom two are to be trumpeters, and a third a tabourer.[3] In course of time the art of minstrelsy came to include all the other instruments which the barbarians found in use among the nations with whom

[1] "Contigit joculatorem ex Longobardorum gente ad Carolum venire, et cantiunculam a se compositam de eadem re, rotando in conspectu suorum, cantare."—Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicæ*, ii. 845.

[2] "Tanta vero illius securitas . . . ut *scurram* se præcedere facerent qui musico instrumento res fortiter gestas et priorum bella præcineret."—Aimoinus, *De Miraculis S. Benedicti*, c. 37, cited by Du Cange under *Ministelli*.

[3] Du Cange, under *Mimus*.

they were brought into contact, those most frequently mentioned being the viol, the clavichord, the rote, and the psaltery.[1] Besides the accomplishment of singing and playing, the professional minstrel, descending from his dignity to meet the growing wants of his patrons, added to his stock of entertainments dancing and even tumbling, in which female as well as male performers displayed their skill;[2] nor did he disdain tricks of magic and sleight of hand. Taillefer at the battle of Hastings appears to have exhibited his dexterity as a "tregetour" (*trajector*), while he animated the courage of the Normans by his heroic chants;[3] and, in the feats of the juggler of the London streets, may be found a lingering tradition of a craft (*jogleur*) which was not without honour in the days of chivalry.

Thus the simple art of the harping minstrel was broken up, by the advance of the Teutonic tribes to a more civil condition of society, into a number of separate branches. These again gradually decayed, or were absorbed into higher forms of art, as tribes grew into nations, and each nation invented fresh methods of luxury and refinement. The more venerable theological and didactic functions of the bard naturally disappeared under the influence of Christianity; and this was especially the case among the Anglo-Saxons. Minstrelsy, in the latter days of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty, when the tide of monastic revival ran strongly, was regarded with much

[1] Wace's enumeration (in his *Brut*) of the different kinds of minstrelsy employed in Arthur's court shows how great was the variety of musical entertainment in the Middle Ages:—

Mult ost a la cort jogleurs,
Chanteors, estrumantéors,
Mult poissez oir chançons,
Rotuenges et voialx sons,
Vileors, lais, et notez,
Laiz de violes, laiz de rotez,
Laiz de harpez, laiz de fretiax,
Lires, tympres, et chalemealx,
Symphoniez, psalterions,
Monacors, des cymbes, chorons,
Assez i ot tregeteors,
Joieresses et joieors,
Li uns dient contes et fables.

[2] Percy, *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*, Note A; and Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (1802), vol. i. p. cxciii.

[3] Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, vol. iii. p. 478, Note 4.

disfavour by the Church, as diverting the thoughts of the people into mundane channels. King Edgar, in one of his canons, published in 960, enjoined that no priest should be an ale-drinker, nor in any wise a minstrel (ȝliwige, *scurra*); and in his oration to Dunstan he expressed his grief that the houses of clerks were become a *conciliabulum* of minstrels.[1] Independently, therefore, of the great change in the manners of the Anglo-Saxons, which brought about the decline in their native poetry, described in an earlier chapter, the influence of monasticism tended in the same direction; and, as we have already seen, the genius of Puritanism, the natural antagonist of the arts of minstrelsy, gives no uncertain sound in the poems of men like Robert of Brunne, the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, and Langland himself. Percy's assertion that the Anglo-Saxon minstrels "continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman Conquest" is not supported by any evidence. If minstrelsy took fresh root and flourished in England after the battle of Hastings, it was owing to the tastes and habits of the Norman conquerors.

Even among these, however, the progress of civil refinement tended to discourage the practice of oral poetry. The number of readers in court and castle increased so much as to provide occupation for the class of scrivener; and greater finish was required in metrical compositions, intended for private study, than could be found in the often improvised songs of the minstrel. When printing was invented, the multiplication of books brought to hundreds of individuals sources of amusement which they could previously only have shared as members of a collective audience. As to the pleasure derived from gesture and mimicry, the growth of dramatic exhibitions, by means of pageants and Miracle Plays, and the composition of plays requiring the co-operation of many actors, drew off a large number of the mimetic minstrels into a separate profession. There was accordingly a constant tendency, as far as the minstrel's art depended on recitation,

[1] Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (1802), vol. i. p. clxxi.

for the singer to seek support from audiences of inferior taste and education; and as far as it depended on instrumental melody, for the musician to supersede the poet. In the former capacity the social status of the minstrel progressively declined, until, in a statute passed in the thirty-ninth year of Elizabeth, he is found to be classed with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and with such is adjudged to be punished.[1] In his latter capacity, on the other hand, he retained something of the rank and privileges he had enjoyed from the earliest times, and his order came to hold a recognised office as court musicians. In the reign of Henry III. the king's harper received a salary of forty shillings and a pipe of wine. Under Edward II. the minstrels claimed privileges which required to be defined by express regulation. In the reign of Henry V. the number of the king's minstrels is recorded, and orders are given for their allowance. A commission was issued under Henry VI. to impress boys as minstrels for the king's service; while under Henry VII. and Henry VIII. ample provision was made for the maintenance of these royal musicians.[2] As late as the reign of George II. traces of the musical element in minstrelsy still survive, in the body of musicians employed about the court under the name of Children of the King's Chapel.[3] From all this it is plain that, though Percy was justified in maintaining that the minstrels were the successors of the ancient bards, this rough statement can only be accepted with very precise qualifications; and that, when he further declares it to be beyond doubt that "most of the old heroic ballads in his collection were composed by this order of men," we ought, in judging of the poetical merit of the ballads, to take into account the very various degrees of taste and refinement in the audience, on whose pleasure the minstrels depended at each successive stage of their history.

(II) The first stage which demands our attention in the

[1] Percy's *Reliques*, "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels."

[2] For the above particulars see Percy's "Essay" referred to in note 1.

[3] There were twenty-four of them. See *Dunciad*, book i. 319, and note (*Pope's Works*, vol. iv. p. 124, Elwin and Courthope's edition).

transition of Teutonic minstrelsy from its early oral period to the age of the "heroic ballads" spoken of by Percy, is the Metrical Romance. Percy's account of the origin of the chivalrous romance is plainly erroneous. He seems to have imagined that the romance was a direct development of the Norse saga, though the particular tales on which he founded his inference were undoubtedly posterior in date to the French romances. Even supposing, however, that Norse sagas were in existence, which might have served as literary models for the metrical romances, it is quite unnecessary to trace the latter class of poem to that source; for it is certain that the Franks, as well as the Northmen, had their minstrels, and these, in the ordinary course of things, no doubt adapted the oral traditions of their art to the requirements of the language, which grew out of their commerce with the conquered races of Gaul. The process must have been extremely gradual; but one of the *fabliaux* preserved by Legrand d'Aussy enables us to form a fairly clear conception of the lines of development.

"Two troops of minstrels," says he, "meet in a castle, and attempt, according to the custom of the times, to amuse the lord by a quarrel. One of them separates himself from his troop; he begins to insult a minstrel of the other company; and after having reproached him with having a mere beggar's dress, and being an ignoramus, who will never have merit enough to get a new coat, and other compliments of the same kind, he boasts of being a better man, and exhibits all his talents in succession. He can *tell* tales, he says, in *Romance* (French) *and Latin;* he knows more than forty *lays* and *chansons de geste,* and all the songs that he could be possibly asked for. He knows also the *Romances of adventure,* and in particular those of the Round Table. Finally, he knows how to *sing* many romances, such as *Vivien, Renaud le Danois,* etc., and how to *tell* others, such as *Flore et Blanchefleur.*"[1]

Now, at the date supposed in this *fabliau,* it is evident

[1] Translated from Legrand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux,* vol. ii. p. 371 (edition 1829).

that the art of minstrelsy had branched into a number of separate channels. We see distinctions very clearly drawn between (1) tales which are *sung* and tales which are *told* or recited; (2) orders of tales, the *chanson de geste* being distinguished from the lay and the romance of adventure; (3) tales told (and doubtless written) in Latin and tales told in French. If we take the *Song of Beowulf* as the normal type of tale prevailing while the art of poetry was in its oral stage among the Teutonic races, we can imagine the manner in which these varieties of composition would have gradually come into existence. *Beowulf* is mythological, genealogical, and to some extent historical, and it contains a narrative of heroic adventure; but it shows no traces of the element of love, and very few of the element of magic or marvel, which together constitute the essential character of romance, as the word is generally understood. In this respect there is little difference between the Anglo-Saxon poem and the early *chansons de geste*, such as the *Chant de Roland* or the *Quatre Fils Aymon*; and these songs may therefore be regarded as types of the earliest compositions of the minstrels in the newly formed Romance languages.

The type was soon modified by contact with Latin literature. In his capacity of historian, the minstrel began to adapt his metrical narrative to such models as were presented to him in the prose chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth; and as this new form of history was reduced to writing in the vulgar tongue, it received the name of *Roman*, to distinguish it from histories composed in Latin. Hence Wace's historical poems are called *Roman de Rou* and *Roman de Brut*. Wace, as we have seen, writes in a spirit quite opposed to that of the mythological historians, who recorded the deeds of their heroes in the traditional forms of song; and his style is equally remote from that of the makers of the fully developed romance, who rely on the frequent introduction of the elements of love and adventure.

A further modification of the old *chanson de geste* was effected by the assimilation of forms of oral poetry in use

among the Celtic races in the North of France. Marie of France, an Anglo-Norman poetess, was the first to imitate the Breton lay in the Romance tongue ; but it is impossible now to discover how much of the matter of her lays is drawn immediately from Celtic sources. It is plain that her poems reflect the state of contemporary feudal society, and that her reference to the Breton MSS., on which she professes to base her story, is therefore, in all probability, one of the fictions common among the poets of her epoch. It is indeed reasonable to suppose that she and other Anglo-Norman poets found in existence, and employed for their own poetical purposes, legends and superstitions common to the Celtic race, and handed down from a remote antiquity. The names of the different knights of the Round Table suggest at once a Celtic origin, and we may conclude that they were each associated with some kind of tradition which would have afforded a groundwork for the fictitious development of their characters. The conception of the Round Table itself would naturally have arisen out of institutions peculiar to the Celtic peoples.[1] The many magical transformations, enchantments, and apparitions of fairies in the Lays of Marie and the Romances of the Round Table may also be reasonably ascribed to the fertility of Celtic superstition. But to go beyond this and to assert that the Arthurian legend, in its existing form, is, at least in outline, a relic of ancient mythology, is to advance a proposition which can hardly be sustained by argument. No support to the theory is furnished by the Tales of the *Mabinogion*, of which there is no MS. older than the fourteenth century, and which are more likely to be the offspring than the parents of the French Romances. Nor do the latter in the least resemble what remains of ancient Welsh minstrelsy. "The most remarkable result," says a very high authority, "of the examination of the earliest literature of the Welsh people, whatever date may be assigned to it, is that in these the older preserved

[1] Athenæus, describing Celtic banquets, says (*Deipnosophistæ*, iv. 32), "When many of them dine together they sit in a circle, and the chief sits in the centre like the leader of the chorus, being distinguished above the rest either by his valour in war, or his birth, or by his wealth."

specimens of Welsh poetry, there is, with the exception of *Taliesin*, a total absence of anything like a tale, or the recital of an adventure, or even of a love story. There is not, as far as I am aware, one single poem or ballad, founded upon an incident or adventure, or which can be said to have a hero or heroine, if we except those descriptive of actual combats, or written in praise of historical persons."[1] The Romances of the Round Table are, indeed, full of touches reflecting the custom and folk-lore of the time, but there is nothing to show that these do not rather proceed from the invention of poets of Scandinavian or Teutonic descent, than from the indigenous traditions of Celtic minstrelsy.[2]

One thing at least is unquestionable in the literary composition of the fully developed Romances of the Round Table: the main factor is the invention of the Anglo-Norman trouvère, fresh, vigorous, flexible, and accustomed to mould at will the materials with which it deals. The matter for the adventurous story

[1] *Taliesin*, by D. W. Nash, p. 322.

[2] Sir G. W. Cox (*Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, p. 281) maintains that the incidents of mediæval romance and Scandinavian folk-lore are equally derived from a primitive Aryan mythology. He says: "Sigurd weds the Valkyrie in Gunnor's form, and lies down by her side with the unsheathed blade of Gram between them." "This incident," he adds in a footnote, "recurs in Grimm's story of the Two Brothers. In the Norse legend of the Big Bird Dan, who is no other than the Arabian Roc, the princess lays the bare sword between her and Ritter. Dr. Dasent adds himself many more instances in the story of Rolf and Ingegerd, of Tristram and Iseult, and he rightly insists that 'these mythical deep-rooted germs, throwing out fresh shoots from age to age in the popular history of the race, are far more convincing proofs of the early existence of their traditions than any mere external evidence' (*Norse Tales*, Introduction, cxlii.)." I confess that this reasoning leaves me quite unconvinced. The story of the naked sword between the sleepers is, on the face of it, a poetic invention, and unless it can be shown, as it certainly cannot, that it is derived from a remote antiquity, it is less probable that such an idea should have occurred quite independently to different poets in different nations, (even though the first ancestors of these may have held a common belief in one solar myth), than that it should have been transmitted from one nation to another either orally or by writing. That it may have been transmitted in either of these ways is evidently quite possible, for Sir G. W. Cox himself says ingenuously: "It is certainly worth noting that the incident is related also of Allah-ud-Deen in the *Arabian Nights*"; and it is certain that the record of the incident in writing, either in its French or Scandinavian form, is posterior to the written record in the *Arabian Nights*. As to the diffusion and variation of ideas derived from a literary source by means of oral minstrelsy, see pp. 455-468.

is supplied partly by the written History of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and partly by the legends preserved in the lays of the Breton bards, the whole being clothed with an imaginative atmosphere of magic and superstition derived from the folk-lore of the Teutonic and, still more, the Celtic races. The result is seen in romances like *Merlin*, *Lancelot*, and the *Mort d'Arthure*. Another element is added by the imagination of the cloister, nourished on the lives of the saints and the apocryphal Gospels, which, with a colouring of vague, Oriental mysticism, produces such romances of adventure as the *Story of the Graal*.

The form of the romance, considered apart from its matter, is due to the invention of a succession of poets, each travelling farther than his predecessor from the primitive type of heroic minstrelsy.

Benoît de Ste. More in the middle of the twelfth century gave new character to the *chanson de geste* by introducing materials not connected with the genealogical traditions of the Northmen. He applied the style of minstrelsy to the story of the Trojan War as told by the false Dictys and Dares, and the naïve fidelity, with which he rendered into his own language the minute details recorded by those ingenious literary forgers, produced a quaint effect which at once made his poem extremely popular. He also prepared the way for the introduction of love episodes into the *roman*, by his narrative of Briseis' fickle behaviour to Troilus; though he himself seems to have simply regarded the incident from a semi-monastic point of view, as illustrating the character of women.

A far greater stride of invention was made by Chrestien de Troyes, who composed somewhat later in the twelfth century than Benoît de Ste. More. In some of his tales the "gests" of one or more heroic warriors were replaced by the moving adventures of a pair of faithful lovers, or of a husband and wife, who, after being separated from each other by a succession of misfortunes, varied by incidents of magic and marvel, are, as a rule, brought into a state of happiness and prosperity at the close

of the story.[1] It will be generally recognised that this is a faithful description of the Greek novel, so that, even if positive evidence were wanting, there would be a fair presumption as to the quarter in which Chrestien looked for his models. The presumption becomes a certainty, when we find that one of the leading episodes in his *Roman de Cliget*—viz. the burial of the heroine, while still alive, in a tomb after the manner of Juliet—is taken directly from the *Habrocomas and Anthia* of Xenophon.[2] Chrestien de Troyes was a retainer of Philip, Count of Flanders, who fell at the siege of Acre in 1191, and it is reasonable to suppose that his attention was drawn to the Greek novels while attending his lord to the Crusades. The fruits of his study of them are seen in his surviving poems, *Enid and Eric*, *Ywain and Gawain* or the *Chevalier au Lion*, the *Roman de Cliget*, and *Guillaume d'Angleterre*. Besides these tales, we know that he was the author of the metrical *Romance of Tristan*, which, in its original form, is unfortunately lost, but which, in all probability, furnished the materials for the famous prose romance relating the adventures of that knight. More than one incident in the romance as it has come down to us resemble episodes in the *Clitophon and Leucippe* of Achilles Tatius.[3]

When Chrestien, who professed his faithful adherence to historical authority, had struck out his new path his example was speedily followed, and his disciples approached still closer to the lines of the Greek novel by composing the cycle of romances on the Round Table in prose. There is, in fact, no more fundamental difference between these two types of romance than we should naturally expect to find between works produced in the decadence of civili-

[1] This is particularly the case in *Guillaume d'Angleterre*. See the analysis of that poem in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xv. (edition of 1869), pp. 221-235.

[2] Compare *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xv. pp. 213-219, with Xenophon, *Ephesiacorum* lib. iii. 5-10.

[3] Such as the mistake about the love-philtre (see *Clitophon and Leucippe*, lib. iv. 15); the trial of chastity (*Clitophon and Leucippe*, lib. viii. 11-14); and the relations between Clitophon, Leucippe, and Melitta, as compared with those between Tristram and the two Iseults (*Clitophon and Leucippe*, lib. v. 11-27).

sation, and works of the same order, composed when the spirit of chivalry was in the fulness of its vigour. The romance writer of the Middle Ages diligently followed the Greek novelist in his attempts to produce a variety of adventures; in his invention of devices, magical or natural, for extricating his actors from dangerous situations; in the general method of managing his plots, such as the use of "recognition" (*ἀναγνώρισις*) and "reversal of fortune" (*περιπέτεια*); in his analysis of the moods of love; but, rightly adhering to the historic character of the earlier *romans*, he substituted hardy and courageous knights for the effete citizens who figure as heroes in the Greek novel.

As time passed on even these external differences tended to disappear. The romances of Arthur and Charlemagne preserved at least the semblance of an historic foundation, and it would seem to be probable that Chrestien took the names of his heroes and heroines, and perhaps derived some of his materials, from legendary Celtic sources. But in the later romances, represented by *Amadis of Gaul* and his numerous progeny, a new character makes its appearance. These stories are invariably written in prose, and show no signs of having sprung from an earlier metrical version. Everything in them betrays the hand of a deliberate inventor, who ransacks literature to obtain materials. The features of the older class of romance are stereotyped and magnified. The hero becomes a person of ideal perfection, such as Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England, Lisuarte of Greece, who reflects lustre on the nation of his birth, although his name may not occur in history. His adventures are very largely with giants. Magic is made to play a more important part in the machinery of the story, than is the case in the romances of the Round Table; and, generally speaking, the author pays great attention to the development of character and the elaboration of the plot. In proportion as he is driven to depend more on his own invention, and reflects less of the life and manners of an all-pervading and poetic chivalry, his style and sentiment continue to degenerate: hence Cervantes makes a just distinction between the earlier and later works

of this class, and excepts *Amadis de Gaul* from the sentence he passes on his offspring, of whom he declares "that the excellence of the father should not avail the son, but that he should be thrown into the court to give a beginning to the bonfire."[1] A practical test of the quality of these late literary romances is furnished by the neglect with which they were treated by the ballad-makers who borrowed so freely from the older legends of Arthur and Charlemagne.

(III) In considering the origin and development of ballad poetry in England, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the nature of this kind of composition. A vague idea prevails that, as the ballad is before all things popular in its character, it was evolved in some mysterious manner out of the genius and traditions of the people themselves. But this was by no means the case. What the people contributed to the making of the ballads was no more than the taste and sentiment which characterise them. They preserved them, it is true, in their memories after they had been composed, but the matter not less than the form of the poem was, as a rule, furnished exclusively by the minstrel, who adapted the ancient traditions of an art, originally intended to please the tribal chieftain or the feudal lord, to the temper of a popular audience. Now as the oldest of the English ballads does not date back farther than the middle of the fourteenth century, at which period the taste of the upper classes of society was occupied either with the prose romances, or with allegorical and other purely literary forms of poetry, while the lower classes, who chiefly cared for minstrelsy, had long been accustomed to the forms of settled government, it is reasonable to expect that, though the wandering gleeman would still preserve the outlines of the primitive art, his handling of the theme would be somewhat degenerate. And this is precisely what we find. The English ballads that have come down to us fall naturally into three classes: those which reflect the characteristics of the ancient *chanson de geste;* those which combine

[1] *Don Quixote*, bk. i. ch. 6.

the features of the *chanson de geste* and the literary romance; and those which have a purely literary origin in the romance, lay, or *fabliau*. To the first class belong ballads like the *Battle of Otterburn* and the *Hunting of the Cheviot;* to the second the cycle of the Robin Hood ballads; to the third ballads like *Sir Aldingar*, *Sir Cauline*, *Earl Brand*, *Child Waters*, and the like. In all of these, the sentiments, the form, the language of the composition, show plain traces of decline from a more ancient and noble model.

If, for example, the *Battle of Otterburn* and the *Hunting of the Cheviot* be compared with the Anglo-Saxon chant of the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, it will at once be seen that the two sets of poems have many points in common. Both recite in song the incidents of a battle; both record the deeds and the speeches of the leaders; both enumerate the names of the slain. There is, moreover, in the *Hunting of the Cheviot* a most interesting example of the long survival of the spirit of the "comitatus," which deserves comparison with the passages of the same kind already cited from the *Death of Byrhtnoth* and from *Beowulf*. I refer to the speech of Witherington. When Percy and Douglas propose to settle the quarrel by single combat,—

> Then bespake a squyre of Northumberland,
> Ric Wytharynton was his name;
> It shall never be tolde in South-Ynglonde, he says,
> To King Harry the fourth for shame.
>
> I wot you bin great lordës twaw,
> I am a poor squyar of land;
> I will never see my captain fight on a field,
> And stand my-self and look on,
> But while I may my weapon wield,
> I will not fail both heart and hand.[1]

But, when we look more closely into the spirit which

[1] It will be convenient to say, once for all, that the extracts of ballads, made now and hereafter, are taken from the splendid collection of Professor Child, to whose unwearied industry I am also mainly indebted for the materials on which I have founded my reasoning as to the nature of the ballad, though he is in no way responsible for my inferences from the facts. I have slightly modernised the spelling in this extract.

respectively marks these compositions, a wide difference becomes at once visible. The scôp who made the *Battle of Maldon* still sings as a genealogist and historian. He is aware of the exact circumstances under which the battle was fought; he preserves the names of the fathers of the combatants; he breathes into the speeches of his heroes a lofty spirit of patriotism. But neither in the *Battle of Otterburn* nor *Chevy Chase* is there any regard for historical truth. Froissart has left us an account of the incidents that actually led to the fight. We know that, in 1388, the Scots mustered a large force for the invasion of England, and that the Earl of Northumberland, not having power enough to resist them, endeavoured to check their advance by threatening a counter-raid into Scotland; that the Scots, hearing of this plan, divided their army into two parts, of which the smaller, numbering 3000, under James Douglas, marched as far south as Durham, burning and ravaging the country, and then retired with much booty by way of Newcastle to Otterburn. Here they were followed and attacked by Harry Percy with nearly 9000 men, but though Douglas was killed, the victory remained with the Scots, and Percy was taken prisoner. The minstrel who composed the *Battle of Otterburn* exactly reverses the truth. He makes Percy attack 44,000 Scots (which was indeed about the number of the main body) with 9000 English, and he gives the victory to the latter, pretending that only eighteen of the Scots remained alive after the battle to five hundred of their antagonists. He represents Percy killing Douglas in single combat, though the latter was actually killed in a *mêlée;* and though he incidentally mentions at the close of the poem that "the Percy was led away," his narrative of the course of the battle is inconsistent with such an ending.

The *Hunting of the Cheviot* shows still greater boldness in handling facts. The minstrel who composed it imagines the cause of the battle to have been a chivalrous poaching expedition made by Percy into Scotland, of which the latter seems to have sent notice to Douglas: the fight,

he says, is generally called the battle of Otterburn, but he fancies that this place is in the Cheviot district: he kills Percy as well as Douglas: he supposes the battle of Homildon Hill in 1401, where Percy was actually in command, to have been fought by King Henry IV., in revenge for Percy's death at Otterburn; and he brings tidings of Douglas's death to "King James" at Edinburgh, although James I. did not begin to reign till 1424.

From the character of these two ballads we may infer with some confidence the motives which inspired their production, and the class of audience to which they were addressed. Both must have been composed long after the date of the battle.[1] Neither can have been intended, in the first place, for the ears of the nobility and gentry, who would scarcely have tolerated the liberties which the minstrels took in dealing with family facts within their own knowledge; on the other hand, both narratives are well calculated to gratify the national pride of the English peasantry, by their record of a stubborn and even fight, which had deeply stirred the imagination of the whole Border-side. The composer of the *Battle of Otterburn*, who had consulted the Chronicles, actually claims credit for his historical accuracy, though he must have known that he was guilty of a flagrant *suppressio veri*:[2] the author of *Chevy Chase* seems to be satisfied with giving a poetical version of the facts as he has received them on the authority of "the oldest inhabitant."[3] Neither the one minstrel nor the other shows any of that sense of responsibility, as a poetical chronicler of recent events, which marks the *Battle of Maldon* or the *Roman de Rou*.

[1] Bishop Percy very justly points out that the *Battle of Otterburn*, the older of the two, cannot have been in existence before 1449, for that was the date of the creation of the earldom of Huntly, who is mentioned among the Scottish leaders.

[2] But nyne thowzand, ther was no moo,
The cronykle wyll not layne [lie];
Forty thowsande of Skottes and fowre
That day fowght them agayne.

[3] This was the hontynge off the Cheviot,
That tear begane this spurn;
Old men that knowen the grownde well yenoughe
Call it the battel of Otterburn.

In judging the poetical sentiment of these songs, we have to take into account that *Chevy Chase* has come down to us, surrounded with all the prestige derived from the praise bestowed on it by Sir Philip Sidney and Addison.[1] Nor is it to be denied that the poetical qualities of the ballad, pointed out with so much judgment by the latter, fully deserve his tribute of commendation. At the same time, it is to be remembered that each of these critics is regarding the ballad from a peculiar point of view; looking back, one in the half-regretful spirit of the knight, the other in the appreciative temper of the man of taste, on the lofty sentiment of those ruder stages of society which they have left behind. When the comparison is made with such earlier productions as the *Song of Beowulf* or the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, we perceive that the *Battle of Otterburn*, and *Chevy Chase*, while vividly reflecting the temper of the audiences for which they are composed, show also how far the Muse of Minstrelsy has declined, with the Genius of Feudalism, from her old-world inspiration. They express the feelings of that portion of the people which, settled on the borders of two rival kingdoms, preserve many of the habits of tribal plunder and private war, long checked at the more civilised centre. The flashes of chivalrous feeling in them are swift, abrupt, brilliant, and display the fantastic exaggeration which belongs to the age of Froissart and his immediate successors. Their character is stamped on such passages as that in which Percy, when besieged in Newcastle, makes a present to Douglas:—

> A pipe of wine he gave them over the walls,
> For sooth as I you say;
> Then he made the Douglas drink,
> And all his host that day;

[1] "Certainly I must confesse my own barbarousnes. I never heard the olde song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart mooved more than with a trumpet; and yet is it sung but by some blinde crouder, with no rougher voyce than rude stile: which being so evill apparrelled in the dust and cobwebbes of that uncivile age, what would it worke trymmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar."—*Apologie for Poetrie.* Compare Addison, *Spectator*, No. 70.

or in Douglas's challenge to Percy in the *Hunting of the Cheviot*:—

Then said the doughty Douglas
Unto the Lord Persee,
"To kill all these guiltless men,
Alas, it were great pitee.

"But, Percy, thou art a lord of land,
I am a yerl called within my contree;
Let all our men upon a party stand,
And do the battle of thee and of me."

"Now Christ's curse on his crown," said the Lord Persee,
"Whosoever thereto says nay!
By my troth, doughty Douglas," he says,
"Thou shalt never see that day.

"Neither in England, Scotland, nor France,
Nor for no man of a woman born,
But, and fortune be my chance,
I dare meet him, one man for one."

Richard Witherington's comment on this proposal has been already quoted, and is in itself evidence of exaggerated sentiment; for why should one of the *comitatus* interfere in a fair agreement to settle the matter by single combat? There is an equal amount of exaggeration in the minstrel's view of the importance of the battle:—

Of fifteen hundred archers of England
Went away but seventy and three;
Of twenty hundred spearmen of Scotland
But even five and fifté.

But all were slain Cheviot within;
They had no strength to stand on hye;
The child may rue that is unborn;
It was the more pitye.

Clearly there is a vast difference between the kind of social atmosphere which inspires such verse as this, and that all-pervading spirit of tribal patriotism which breathes with a steady flame through the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, and produces a passage like the following:—

"One of the shipmen crippled the hero's hand with a blow. The fallow-hilted sword fell to the ground; he could no longer hold it. But the gray battle-hero still cheered on the youths; his feet refused to serve him; he

looked toward heaven and said: 'I thank thee, Ruler of Peoples, for all the joys I have had in the world. Now, mild Creator, I have most need that thou grant my spirit good, that my soul may go to thee, may pass with peace into thy power, King of Angels.' Then the heathen struck him down, and the two heroes who fought near him, Ælfnoth and Wulfmær, gave up their spirits at their lord's side."

If again we compare the Robin Hood ballads with the legends which produced the Romances of the Round Table, we arrive at much the same conclusion. No cycle of ballads, indeed, furnishes a more striking example than the former, of the manner in which a popular myth grows and lives in the national memory. It is by no means necessary, though it may often happen, that a widespread legend should have its basis in positive fact; what is indispensable is that, at the fitting moment, a poet shall appear to personify in a definite form the feelings floating vaguely in the public imagination. There may, or may not, have been an actual outlaw named Robin Hood. As early as the beginning of the fifteenth century Robin Hood and Little John are spoken of as real personages,[1] but it may be doubted whether the chroniclers had any evidence of their existence more trustworthy than the ballads in which the outlaws are celebrated, and which are sarcastically referred to by Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*.[2] It is plain, however, that the man who composed, or furnished the basis for, the ballad called *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde, perhaps as early as 1492, was dealing, in the romantic form natural to a popular minstrel, with precisely the same kind of social circumstances as those with which Langland himself dealt as a moral reformer. The *Gest* opens with a description of Robin Hood's character and code of morals:—

[1] Wynton, *Chronicle of Scotland* about 1420, cited by Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part v. p. 41.

[2] Sloth, in the *Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins*, says, that he knows "rymes of Robin Hood and Randolf, Erle of Chester." Skeat's *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, vol. i. p. 167.

A good manner then had Robin Hood
In land where that he were:
Every day ere he would dine
Three masses would he hear.

The one in the worship of the Father,
And another of the Holy Ghost,
The third of our dear Lady,
That he loved of all the most.

Robin loved our dear Lady,
For doubt of deadly sin.
Would he never do company harm
That any woman was in.

"Master," then said Little John,
"And we our board shall spread,
Tell us whither that we shall go,
And what life that we shall lead;

"Where we shall take, where we shall leave,
Where we shall abide behind;
Where we shall rob, where we shall reve,
Where we shall beat and bind."

"Thereof no force," then said Robin,
"We shall do well enow;
But look ye do no husband wrong,
That tilleth with his plough.

"No more ye shall do no good yeoman,
That walketh by greenwood shaw,
Ne no knight, ne no squier,
That will be a good fellaw.

"These bishops and these archbishops
Ye shall them beat and bind;
The high sheriff of Nottingham,
Him hold ye in your mind."

Here we see the uprising of the Saxon spirit personified in the outlaw, Robin Hood, against tyranny and injustice, just as the ideas of the public conscience regarding the corruptions of the time are reflected in Piers the Ploughman. Both poets favour the same classes of the community, the knight, the squire, the yeoman, the husbandman; both attack the same classes of offenders, the highly-beneficed clergy, and corrupt ministers of justice, civil or ecclesiastical. In the course of the *Gest*, the Chief Justice of England appears, in collusion with an abbot, attempting to deprive a knight of his land; and a fat

monk, "an out-rider that lovéd venerie," is stripped by Robin of his superfluity.

But while the *sacer vates* of Robin Hood thus founded his main conception on the public opinion of his rude audience, it is most interesting to observe, in illustration of the decline of minstrelsy, how entirely he depends for his poetical details on pre-existing literary materials. Thus the idea of heroic outlawry seems to be derived from the story of Fulke Fitz-Warine, a noble robber in the time of King John;[1] the idea of Robin's piety is suggested by the tale of a knight in the *Legenda Aurea*, who was in the habit of robbing everybody who passed by his castle, but never allowed any business to come in the way of his devotions.[2] Robin in the *Gest* makes a loan to an impecunious knight, who first offers as his security "God that died on tree," and when this is declined, says that he can give no other but "our dear Lady"—a pledge that is at once accepted by the outlaw as sufficient. A similar incident is found recorded among the miracles of the Virgin, where also Our Lady intervenes to bring about the repayment of the money as she does in the ballad.[3] King John, in the history of Fulke Fitz-Warine, is decoyed by the outlaw with a stratagem like that which Robin uses with the Sheriff of Nottingham;[4] and Robin plays at "pluck-buffet" with the king, who goes to see him in the forest, in the manner first related by the old romance of *Richard Cœur de Lion*, and afterwards immortalised in *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott.[5] The Romances of the Round Table are also looked to as models. Robin Hood will not dine until he has met with some rich man to pay for his entertainment, any more than King Arthur will dine before he has heard of some adventure.[6]

[1] W. F. Prideaux in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, ii. 421: Maid Marian seems to be taken from this romantic history. See Wright's *History of Fulke Fitz-Warine*, pp. 32, 33.

[2] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part v. p. 51.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 51. [4] Wright, *History of Fulke Fitz-Warine*, pp. 145-47.

[5] *Richard Cœur de Lion* (Weber, ii. 34), 748-98.

[6] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ii. 257.

In bringing together these diverse materials, so as to present a story of interest and verisimilitude, the ballad-maker has given proof of no mean poetical skill, showing that the *Gest* must have been composed while the art of the trouvère was far from extinct; and in the same way the *Hunting of the Cheviot* points to the survival in certain parts of the country of the heroic genius of Teutonic minstrelsy. But the great majority of the ballads that have come down to us exhibit a course of always degenerating taste. When the poets of Europe first began to commit their thoughts to writing in the vulgar tongues, they naturally laid their foundations in the art of minstrelsy, so that many of the existing forms of oral recitation were transformed into instruments of literature. The lyrics of the troubadours grew into the sonnets of Dante and Petrarch: the metrical and prose romances made the starting point for *Don Quixote* and the modern novel; the *lai*, the *dit*, and the *fabliau* contain the germs of the *Canterbury Tales*, the Elizabethan drama, and the Georgian satire. Conversely, as the men of high imagination were drawn off to literary composition by the new wants of the court and castle, the singers of a poorer quality sought to gain a livelihood by carrying the old arts of minstrelsy into the country districts. Wanting in invention, and striving to adapt themselves to the tastes of their hearers, they naturally had recourse to the ideas of their predecessors; and accordingly we find, as an almost invariable rule, that the ballad, when composed in the first place for the purposes of amusement, reproduces, in a mould peculiar to itself, the subject matter of the older gests, romances, or lays. The tales on which it is founded are rarely, if ever, the legacy of long oral tradition: they can be traced through an incessant course of transmutations, combinations, and corruptions to a literary source; and at each stage of their journey we know that the art of some nameless poet must have been at work to clothe the migratory spirit in a new metrical form.

A ballad of the romantic class may be either (1) an abstract or skeleton of a romance such as *The Marriage*

*of Sir Gawain, The Boy and Mantle, King Arthur and King Cornwall;* (2) one of a variety of versions which have branched from the stem of a single *fabliau*, such as the numerous ballads deriving from the story of the Patient Griselda—*e.g. Fair Annet, Child Waters* and others; (3) a romance adapted to the character of some real personage, such as *Thomas the Rhymer;* or (4) a legend arising out of a confused recollection of history, such as *Sir Aldingar.* It may be useful to examine more particularly the character of the last-named ballad, as it furnishes an admirable example of the manner in which the materials of this class of poetry are preserved and modified.

The story of the ballad is as follows: Sir Aldingar, steward of a certain King Henry, being repulsed in an attempt on the virtue of his queen, revenges himself by placing a lazar or leper in her bed and showing him to the king, who determines in his rage to hang the leper and burn his wife. The queen claims a champion to prove her innocence by single combat, but for a long time is unable to find one who will undertake her cause. At last one of her messengers, riding into the East, meets with a little child, who sends word to her to be of good cheer; and on the day of the ordeal this strange champion appears in the lists, when the queen is actually at the stake, and challenging Sir Aldingar, who is a giant, to fight, strikes off his legs at the knee. The steward confesses his guilt: he, or his conqueror, urges the king to take back his wife; the leper is reprieved at the gallows foot, and is promoted to honour. This ballad was committed to writing in the middle of the seventeenth century; there is, of course, no evidence to show the length of its oral existence; but the language of the poem in its surviving form does not denote antiquity.

It is plain, however, that the story, on which the ballad was based, had been long established in literature. William of Malmesbury, writing about the middle of the twelfth century, relates that Gunhild, daughter of King Canute, and wife of the Emperor Henry III., a woman of extraordinary beauty, being accused of adultery, put

forward as her champion a boy who had accompanied her from England, and who miraculously cut off the legs of the queen's accuser, a man of gigantic stature. Gunhild after this declined to live with the king, and passed the rest of her days in a convent.[1]

The facts recorded of Gunhild by William are not historical, as she lived quietly with her husband and died of the plague at Ravenna two years after her marriage, in 1036. It is likely, however, that, as her married name was changed to Cunigunda, the story has been, partially at any rate, transferred to her account from that of St. Cunigund, wife of the Emperor Henry II., who, when accused of infidelity to her husband, offered to prove her innocence by walking over red-hot iron, and accomplished the feat. The confusion is the more probable, since Gunhild's mother Emma has the credit of having passed successfully through a similar ordeal,[2] which indeed figures in the lives of two other saintly queens, who ended their lives in monasteries: one, Richarda, wife of Charles III., in the ninth, and the other, Gundeberg, wife of the Lombard King Arioald, as far back as the seventh century. William of Malmesbury perhaps derived his account from a Latin poem on the subject. He does not mention the names of the actors in the story, but they are given in a French metrical life of Edward the Confessor, dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, and professing to be "translatée du Latin." From this we learn that the accuser's name was Rodegan, which in the original Latin was no doubt Rodingarus,[3] and the champion's, Mimecan.

All the materials were thus provided for the treatment of the story as a subject for minstrelsy, and in

[1] *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ii. 188 (Duffus Hardy's edition, 1840).

[2] A ballad on this subject seems to have been popular. It is mentioned in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, when dykers and delvers are said to "drive forth the long day with, Dieu vous save Dame Emma," alluding to the favouring cries of the people that greeted the queen during the ordeal.

[3] The Latin name is given in the *Abbreviationes* of Ralph de Diceto, ed. Stubbs, i. 174; and it is Englished as Roddyngar in Brompton's *Chronicle*, written at the close of the fourteenth century.—*English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, iii. 38 (footnote).

this form it was at a later date widely propagated over the North of Europe. The tale of *Ravengaard og Memcring* is preserved in Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic ballads, the oldest of which was committed to writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, a hundred years before the oldest of the English versions. These Scandinavian ballads handle the facts recorded by William of Malmesbury in the free spirit of minstrelsy; and one of them, curiously enough, combines with them the story of Cunigund's and Emma's ordeal of walking on red-hot iron. There is nothing in the English ballad to show that the minstrel was indebted to his Norse predecessors: on the contrary his version up to a certain point would seem to be taken directly from the Latin, for "Sir Aldingar" is plainly a variation of Sir Raldingar, corrupted from Sir Rodingar; while in other respects the incidents of his story follow Malmesbury's narrative, rather than the version of *Ravengaard og Memcring*. He seems, however, to have felt, what the Scandinavian minstrels overlooked, that it was a defect in the original story to represent the king accepting the charge against the queen on the mere word of the steward; and, to remedy this defect, he inserts the incident of the leper shown to the king lying in the queen's bed. This he probably borrowed from the *Karlamagnus Saga*, where Oliva, the sister of Charlemagne, is falsely accused of the same crime, and by the same kind of accuser, as Gunhilda, the charge being supported by the introduction into her bed of a black beggar.[1] The advance of rationalism is yet more visible in a later and balder version of the story, written down from the recitation of an old woman, and published in Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* in 1803. All supernatural details in the legend, such as the apparition of the mysterious child, and his victory over the gigantic steward, have disappeared in this ballad: the poet, improving on the *Karlamagnus Saga*, administers a drugged potion to the leper before conveying him to the queen's bed; the champion is a knight called Sir Hugh le

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part iii. p. 39.

Blond, whose sword, says Scott, was believed by the country people to be actually in the possession of his descendants![1]

*Thomas the Rhymer*, on the other hand, is a brilliant example of a ballad in which the art of minstrelsy is employed to preserve, in a glorified form, the memory of a real man in whom the popular imagination is interested. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the fame of Thomas of Erceldoune, or Thomas Rymour, or True Thomas, for prophecy, was celebrated through Scotland; and the predictions attributed to him had so much consistency, that in 1603 they were collected into a volume with the Prophecies of Merlin. Thomas Rymour of Erceldoune is known to have been a real person, who is reported to have been alive in the closing years of the thirteenth century; and it may well be believed that, in speaking of him, the country folk often discussed the question whence he derived his knowledge of the future. Scandinavian folk-lore would naturally have attributed his gift to the good-will of the elves, but the aid of a particular minstrel was required to describe the manner in which it was bestowed. Not original enough to invent a story for himself, the minstrel who took Thomas as his hero sought his materials in existing romances, and by the middle of the fifteenth century a poem, which forms the groundwork of the ballads on the subject, was committed to writing. In its most essential features the story in the poem was taken from the romance of *Ogier le Danois*, which relates how that hero was carried to Avalon by Morgan the Fay, and lived there for centuries without perceiving the lapse of time; moreover, the style of the narrative, particularly the length and detail of the descriptions, was in the approved manner of metrical romance.[2]

[1] *Border Minstrelsy* (1803), iii. 42.

[2] See *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part ii. pp. 326-29. The reader who will refer to Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, c. 21, and Ælian, *Var. Hist.* iii. 18, will find in those two passages, the substance of which may have been transferred into some Latin Encyclopædia, the leading features in the stories of Ogier the Dane and Thomas the Rhymer; namely, Fairy-land (the country called Ἄνοστος); the residence of mortals with immortals; the gift of prophecy bestowed on the former; their periodical return to the world of mankind; and the trees whose fruit produced for those who ate of it endless suffering or perpetual youth.

In a later age came the ballad-singer, who in this case must be allowed to have improved on the form of his original. He preserved the local touches, "Huntly Banks" and the "Eildon Tree," by which the fifteenth-century romance-writer had given an air of reality to his borrowed story, but condensed into a few rapidly moving stanzas the succession of marvels, which tended to lose their brilliancy in the diffuse narrative of his poem. At the same time his style shows signs of having been degraded to suit the tastes of a vulgar audience. Thomas, in the poem, is said to have put forth his hand to pluck the fruit growing in Fairyland, but is prevented by the fairy queen, for

> "If thou it pluck, soothly to say,
> Thy saule goes to the fire of hell."

The ballad-maker, in one of the existing versions, represents him as wishing to eat the fruit because he was hungry, while the fairy queen offers to satisfy him with most substantial food!

> "Hold your hand, Thomas," she said,
> "Hold your hand, that must not be,
> It was a' that cursed fruit o' thine
> Beggared man and woman in your countrie.
> But I have a loaf and a soup o' wine,
> And ye shall go home and dine with me."[1]

Thus the legend gradually assumed a shape which adapted it to the imagination of the whole country-side. The actual name, Thomas Rymour, was elevated, through the art imputed to its owner, into Thomas the Rhymer; the actual Eildon Tree came to be regarded with awe as the place at which Thomas entered into Fairyland; the established reputation of the lord of Erceldoune for second-sight was accounted for by his long residence in the kingdom of the elves.

The tendency of the late singer to particularise stories

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Version B, Part ii. p. 324. It must be observed, however, that the version given in the *Border Minstrelsy* avoids this vulgarity.

founded on time-honoured superstitions, for the purpose of bringing down his ideas to the level of his audience, is observable in such ballads as *Tam Lin* and *The Broomfield Hill.* The former is founded on the widespread ancient belief in transformation, and the hero, a water-sprite, is represented as having been carried off, like True Thomas, by the queen of the fairies; but his name is of a very rustic kind, and the heroine, Fair Janet, or Fair Jenny, who restores Tam to his human shape, holds her interviews with him at the well of Carterhaugh, at the confluence of the Ettrick with the Yarrow.[1] In *The Broomfield Hill* the story of a lady who disappoints her lovers by putting them to sleep with magic, which appears in a written form before the close of the twelfth century, is localised, and the magic feat is accomplished by means of the flowers growing on a particular hill.[2] In the same way, another ballad, founded on the very ancient idea of winning a bride by the guessing of riddles, ascribes the successful courtship to a hero, distinguished by the modern, and rather prosaic, name of Captain Wedderburn.[3]

In their style and sentiment the ballads reflect the tastes of those for whom they were composed. The object of the singer was always to present a striking dramatic story in a short form, with rapid transitions and violent contrasts. Hence, when he borrowed, as he usually did, the substance of a romance, he seized on the salient points, and brought them before the minds of his audience by vulgar exaggeration. For example, there are two considerable cycles of ballads, illustrating the patience of women, and founded on the story of Griselda, and also on the *Lai del Fresne*, told with such admirable delicacy by Marie de France. In *Child Waters*, which represents the former, the brutality of Count Walter, repulsive enough in Boccaccio's tale, is exaggerated into disgusting cruelty; while of Fair Annie, the forsaken heroine, who stands for La Fresne in Marie's *Lai*, after she has meekly welcomed her lover's bride, the ballad-maker says:—

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part ii. p. 340.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 390. [3] *Ibid.* p. 414.

Annie made her bed a little forbye
To hear what they might say;
"And ever alas!" Fair Annie cried,
"That I should see this day!

"Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,
Running on the castle wa',
And I were a gray cat mysell,
I soon would worry them a'."

Of the courtly refinements of chivalrous love it is needless to say there is no trace in the ballads; the passions represented in them are lovers' despair (as in *Lord Lovel*);[1] woman's jealousy (as in *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*);[2] vengeance for dishonour by a husband (as in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*),[3] or by a family (as in *Clerk Saunders*),[4] the avenging act being often accompanied by horrible barbarity (as in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*).

As the ballad was usually a *précis* of a romance, it developed certain poetical features of its own, the most notable of which were abrupt transitions, repetitions of phrases, and conventional formulæ. The effect may be compared to what would be presented by a paragraph of prose, in which the sentences should be without connecting particles. Sometimes this habit of condensation produced brilliant effects, as may be seen in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*, a splendid piece of swift and vigorous action. But, quite as often, compression led to obscurity, and in many ballads the story could not have been understood, if the singer had not prefaced it with some explanation. It is to be remembered that the music was an important part of the performance, so that there was always a temptation, in the composition of ballads, to let sound prevail over sense. Some results of this may be seen in the frequent introduction of meaningless burdens, and the constant use of the number *three*, on account of the convenience of the word for rhyming purposes.

It will not be inappropriate to close this chapter with a ballad, the history of which illustrates, in a striking

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part iii. p. 204.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 179. [3] *Ibid.* p. 242. [4] *Ibid.* p. 156.

manner, the genius of minstrelsy, and the facilities which the strongly-marked forms of this kind of poetry offer to the imitator. Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Border* contained the famous ballad of Mary Hamilton in the following form :—

1 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' ribbons in her hair ;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than ony that were there.

2 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' ribbons on her breast ;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than he listened to the priest.

3 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' gloves upon her hands ;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than the queen and a' her lands.

4 She hadna been about the king's court
A month but barely one,
Till she was beloved by a' the king's court,
And the king the only man.

5 She hadna been about the king's court
A month but barely three,
Till frae the king's court Marie Hamilton
Marie Hamilton durstna be.

6 The king is to the Abbey gane,
To pu' the Abbey-tree,
To scale the babe frae Marie's heart !
But the thing it wadna be.

7 O she has row'd it in her apron,
And set it on the sea,—
"Gae sink ye, or swim ye, bonny babe,
Ye's get nae mair o' me."—

8 Word is to the kitchen gane,
And word is to the ha',
And word is to the noble room,
Amang the ladyes a',
That Marie Hamilton's brought to bed,
And the bonny babe's mist and awa'.

9 Scarcely had she lain down again,
And scarcely fa'en asleep,

When up then started our gude queen
Just at her bed-feet;
Saying—"Marie Hamilton, where's your babe?
For I am sure I heard it greet."—

10 "O no, O no, my noble queen!
Think no such thing to be;
'Twas but a stitch into my side,
And sair it troubles me."—

11 "Get up, get up, Marie Hamilton:
Get up and follow me;
For I am going to Edinburgh town,
A rich wedding for to see."—

12 O slowly, slowly rase she up,
And slowly put she on,
And slowly rode she out the way
Wi' mony a weary groan.

13 The queen was clad in scarlet,
Her merry maids all in green;
And every town that they cam to,
They took Marie for the queen.

14 "Ride hooly, hooly, gentlemen,
Ride hooly now wi' me!
For never, I am sure, a wearier burd
Rade in your companie."—

15 But little wist Marie Hamilton,
When she rade on the brown,
That she was ga'en to Edinburgh town,
And a' to be put down.

16 "Why weep ye so, ye burgess wives,
Why look ye so on me?
O, I am going to Edinburgh town,
A rich wedding for to see."—

17 When she gaed up the Tolbooth stairs,
The corks frae her heels did flee;
And lang or e'er she cam down again,
She was condemn'd to dee.

18 When she cam to the Netherbow Port,
She laughed loud laughters three;
But when she cam to the gallows foot,
The tears blinded her ee.

19 "Yestreen the queen had four Maries,
The night she'll hae but three;
There was Marie Seaton, and Marie Beaton,
And Marie Carmichael, and me.

20 "O, often have I dress'd my queen,
And put gold upon her hair;
But now I've gotten for my reward
The gallows to be my share.

21 "Often have I dress'd my queen,
And often made her bed;
But now I've gotten for my reward
The gallows tree to tread.

22 "I charge ye all, ye mariners,
When ye sail ower the faem,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit
But that I'm coming hame.

23 "I charge ye all, ye mariners,
That sail upon the sea,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit
This dog's death I'm to dee.

24 "For if my father and mother got wit,
And my bold brethren three,
O mickle wad be the gude red blude
This day wad be spilt for me!

25 "O little did my mother ken,
That day she cradled me,
The lands I was to travel in,
Or the death I was to dee."[1]

Scott was of opinion that this ballad was founded on a story told by John Knox of a child-murder, committed by a Frenchwoman of the court of Mary Queen of Scots, who had had an intrigue with an apothecary, and who, with her paramour, was executed for the crime. He observed, however, "It will readily strike the reader the tale has suffered great alterations, as handed down by tradition; the French waiting-woman being changed into Mary Hamilton, and the queen's apothecary into Henry Darnley." He might have added that Mary Hamilton was not one of the

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. p. 392, Version I.

"Queen's Maries," any more than Mary Carmichael; the names of the four being really Mary Beaton, Mary Seaton, Mary Livingstone, and Mary Fleming. Another difficulty was pointed out by Kirkpatrick Sharpe in 1824. "If," said he, "Marie Hamilton was executed in Scotland, it is not likely that her relations resided beyond seas; and we have no proof that Hamilton was really the name of the woman who made a slip with the queen's apothecary."[1]

Sharpe's suspicions led him to track with great sagacity the story of the ballad to its true source. In 1719, one Mary Hamilton, maid of honour to the Empress Catherine, was beheaded *in Russia* for child-murder. She was a woman of extraordinary beauty, and had been the mistress of the Czar, but had fallen under the displeasure of himself and the Empress, and, having engaged in an intrigue with a certain Orlof, was accused of being the mother of a child, whose dead body had been found in a well, wrapped in a court napkin. Mary at first denied the charge, but, when put to the torture, confessed her guilt, and was condemned to death. On the scaffold she appeared dressed in white (as in one of the versions of the ballad), hoping, but vainly, to touch the heart of the Czar, who seems to have been present at the execution, in the same way as the King of Scotland is represented in some of the ballads.[2]

Here was a set of facts excellently adapted for the ballad-maker's use; and looking to the history of minstrelsy, and the different versions of the ballad which have come down to us, it is not difficult to divine the stages by which the *Mary Hamilton* of Scott's version came into existence. The first maker, evidently a man of some genius, conceived the happy idea of throwing back the incidents of the actual tragedy into the reign of Mary Queen of Scots, and turning the real Mary Hamilton into one of the Queen's Maries.[3] In doing this he may have been helped by some ballad with which he was acquainted, for John Knox says in his *History of the Reformation*: "What bruit the Maries and

[1] Preface to *Ballad Book*, p. 18 (1824).

[2] For a full account of the story see *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. pp. 382-83.

[3] See Version A in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. p. 384.

the rest of the dancers of the court had the ballads of that age did witness, which we for modesty's sake omit."[1] The incidents in the ballad of the murder of the child, and Mary Hamilton's denial of her guilt, were naturally suggested by the actual facts; but the circumstances leading to the execution, namely, the order given by the Queen, the entrance of Mary into Edinburgh, and her speech on the scaffold, are admirable inventions of the poet. Stanza 18 of the ballad is borrowed from *Sir Patrick Spens;* and the fine thought of the address to the sailors was suggested partly by the fact of a Scotswoman being executed in Russia, and partly by two pathetic stanzas in the ballad of the *Twa Brothers*, in which a boy, having accidentally received a mortal wound from his brother, urges the latter to conceal his death from their parents.[2] But though the genius of this ballad-maker was considerable, his taste was vulgar. He begins as follows:—

Word's gane to the kitchen,
And word's gane to the ha',
That Marie Hamilton gangs with bairn
To the highest Stewart of a'.

He's courted her in the kitchen,
He's courted her in the ha',
He's courted her in the laigh cellar,
And that was warst of a'.

When Mary is about to die,

"Bring me a bottle of wine," she says,
"The best that e'er ye hae,
That I may drink to my well-wishers,
And they may drink to me."

He closed his ballad with stanza 19 of Scott's version.

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Knox's Works (Laing), vol. ii. 415.

[2] "But what will I say to my father dear,
Gin he chance to say, 'Willie, whar's John?'"
"Oh say that he's to England gone
To buy him a cask of wine."

"And what will I say to my mother dear,
Gin she chance to say, 'Willie, whar's John?'"
"Oh say that he's to England gone
To buy her a new silk gown."

A later maker, of very fine taste, perceiving the merits and defects of this version, removed the vulgar details, supplied the poetical opening as it stands in Scott's version, added the effective touch of the "rich wedding," which the Queen gives as the reason for the journey to Edinburgh, and judiciously closed the poem, in the same way as the original inventor, with the beautifully melodious stanza about the Queen's Maries.[1] Like his predecessor, however, he spoke of Mary Queen of Scots in a very unhistorical manner:—

> And down then cam the *auld* queen,
> Goud tassels tied her hair.

Scott's poet saw that this was wrong, and changed "auld" into "*gude* queen"; but in other respects altered the second maker's version much for the worse. He had, indeed, sufficient taste to preserve the amended opening, but he seems to have been loth to part with the details of "the kitchen" and "the ha'," which he reintroduces at a later stage. Nor was he well inspired when he changed the position of the stanza on the Queen's Maries, leaving the poem with a flat and prosaic ending.

The curious history of this ballad has a practical significance for the critic, in view of the great influence which, since the publication of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, the ballad form has exercised on the course of our poetry. Appearing at a time when there was an incipient revolt in the world of taste against the trammels of classical rule, and an uprising of the democratic spirit against government by aristocracy, Percy's book was seized as a weapon by the leaders of the new movement. They argued from its contents that the ballad was the heroic product of popular genius; and they contrasted the supposed "natural" style of the ballad with the "poetical diction," in vogue with the verse-writers of the day, against which they directed their main attack. The history of ballad poetry, however, does not justify their reasoning. All the evidence cited in this chapter shows that, so far

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, p. 390, Version G.

from the ballad being a spontaneous product of popular imagination, it was a type of poem adapted, by the professors of the declining art of minstrelsy, from the romances once in favour with the educated classes. Everything in the ballad—matter, form, composition—is the work of the minstrel; all that the people do is to remember and repeat what the minstrel has put together; and, in order to assist the memory, the minstrel continues to use from age to age stereotyped moulds of diction, no less artificial than the stilted phraseology of literary poetry criticised by Wordsworth.

*Mary Hamilton* furnishes an apt illustration of this remark. The story does not take its rise out of Scottish history: the ballad-maker chooses a striking incident from foreign parts, and gives it a national colour to suit the taste of his audience. The language of the ballad in no way reflects "the language of the peasantry," but follows the venerable precedents handed down by generations of minstrels. Mary Hamilton laughs "loud laughters three," and "the tear blinds her ee," because the same kind of emotion had been previously exhibited by Sir Patrick Spens; the accent is thrown upon the last syllable in a word like "bodye," because one age of poets after another had found this obsolete pronunciation useful for rhyming purposes; when the Queen bids Mary rise, she does not say, as Wordsworth would have required, "for I am going to Edinburgh to see a rich wédding," but

> For I am going to Edinburgh town
> A rich weddíng for to see.

By artifices of this kind a ballad-maker, putting his materials into shape at least as late as 1719, is easily able to persuade a critic, so familiar with the style of minstrelsy as Scott, that, in *Mary Hamilton*, oral tradition has preserved through many generations the memory of a real incident in the court of Mary Queen of Scots.

## CHAPTER XII

### A RETROSPECT

THE reader was warned that, in the early stages of this history, he must not look for the interest arising out of biographical or artistic detail. We have to regard the art of English poetry as a reflection of the imaginative life of the English people; and it would be as unreasonable to expect a clearly defined conscience, or finished eloquence, in a young nation, as in a young child. What is of interest in our early poetry is the growth of embryonic life; the fusion of the opposite characters of antagonistic races, the gradual formation of moulds of thought, the secret transmutations of language and rhythm. The course of the narrative has hitherto been confined to the development of metrical composition during the Middle Ages, when the poets are seen for the most part to be creating new forms of art out of the swathing bands and envelopes of thought with which they are surrounded. Except in the work of Chaucer, no commanding personality of character has yet made its appearance, but now that we are entering on the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation, we shall soon see that Englishmen have, through the labours of their predecessors, acquired the power of giving harmonious expression to their individual ideas and sentiments. It will be well, therefore, before approaching the works of Surrey and Wyatt, to survey the extent of the ground described in this volume as having been conquered for the rising art of English poetry.

In order to trace the connection of thought between the period known as the Renaissance and the period

known as the Middle Ages, it was necessary to show how the intellectual system of the Middle Ages grew out of the Roman Empire. Hence, at the outset of this history, we occupied ourselves with a brief preliminary survey of the state of European society, on the eve of the irruption of the barbarians. Looking back to those times, a multitude of cities is seen in the south and west of Europe, in Asia Minor, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, preserving, under the guardianship of the Roman Empire, all the treasures bequeathed to them by ancient art and philosophy, but, politically and intellectually, vegetating in the last stages of decay. One great organisation alone, the Christian Church, remains conspicuously alive in the midst of the universal torpor, and absorbs into its system the various vital forces, which once animated the framework of Hellenic culture. Then the dykes of civilisation give way, and the face of civilised Europe is covered with wave after wave of those whom the "populous North" poured from

> Her frozen loins, to cross
> Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons
> Came like a deluge on the South, and spread
> Beneath Gibraltar to the Libyan sands.

All traces of the ancient civilisation seem to be submerged beneath the ever-flowing tide of barbaric immigration. Nevertheless the continuity of intellectual life is all the time secretly maintained by the educational system of the Catholic Church; and on the Continent old ideas and traditions pass into the life of Europe in a new form by the transmutation of the tongues of the barbarous conquerors into the Romance languages. The fresh and vigorous imagination of the Teutonic tribesman is refined by the intellectual training of the Church; and his minstrels, introduced to rich sources of knowledge, learn how to convert poetry from an oral into a literary art.

Posted on the western flank of Europe, and preserved by their insular position from the succession of tempests, which, with each new tide of conquest, make fresh ravages in what remains of civil society on the Continent, the various Teutonic tribes, after their settlement in Britain,

fuse themselves, by means of common laws, customs, and language, into a single nation. But they lose vitality by isolation ; and, in the eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxons, lacking initiative energy, need the shock of the Norman Conquest to bring them into sympathy with the main current of European life. The fusion of French thoughts, words, and metres in the body of the slowly changing "Englisc" prepares the way for those forms of metrical harmony, in which Chaucer expresses the ideas of the English nation, as it emerges from its mediæval chrysalis into a consciousness of its own existence.

The various classes of English poetry—epical, allegorical, dramatic—reviewed in this volume, are to be regarded as the moulds which poetical invention constructed for itself out of its intellectual surroundings. In each class we see the same principle at work, namely, a movement away from the original didactic purpose of poetry, either towards the direct imitation of nature, or towards the mere technical development of art. Thus the moral character of the tale, as illustrated in the fables of Bidpai, changes gradually into the epical representation of human action and passion. The elaborate "moralisation," with which the ecclesiastical story-teller of the *Gesta Romanorum* sanctifies profane fables, is dropped in the *Canterbury Tales ;* the "occasion," which provides the framework for the collection of written stories, is sought by Boccaccio and Chaucer in the incidents of actual life.

A somewhat similar movement discovers itself in the history of allegorical poetry. Allegory is at first employed as an aid to spiritual thought, as in the myths of Plato or in the parables of the Bible. Afterwards it becomes the recognised philosophical method of interpretation, and, being applied to the text of Scripture, is universally adopted as a necessary part of Christian instruction. An atmosphere of scholasticism is thus created, which in course of time generates a new kind of poetry. The habit of abstract thinking multiplies the personification of abstract qualities ; these are then engaged in an imaginary action, as in the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, or in Martianus

Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology;* while, at a later period, the order of material nature is taken, in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, as a symbol of the order of the spiritual world. The forms of allegory are used for moral and satiric purposes, by John de Meung in the *Roman de la Rose*, and by Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman.* They also naturally associate themselves with the conceptions of chivalrous love, first embodied in the lyrics of the troubadours, and afterwards transferred into the didactic narrative of William de Lorris. Finally, when these various kinds of matter are exhausted, the form of allegory is still preserved as a stereotyped mode of composition, and abstract personages penetrate even into the regions of romance, as in Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure.*

So too with the Drama. Employed in the first instance by the clergy, to bring home Scripture truths to the minds of the people, in a visible form, the Miracle Play is soon appropriated by the people themselves, as a mode of entertainment for their religious festivals. The principle of imitation by degrees overpowers the principle of instruction; the dramatist, who, in the first instance, thought principally of the meaning of the Scripture dogma, begins to occupy himself with the human interest of the imaginary situation; in course of time he enlarges the scope of the sacred drama, by introducing the action of allegorical personages; hence arises the new dramatic form of the Morality, in which the poet is able to use greater freedom in the elaboration of his plot and fable. From this point it requires but a single step to drop the direct didactic purpose of the play; to leave the moral to be inferred from the situation; and to rely entirely on the interest excited by the action and passion of the *dramatis personæ.*

In considering the origin and growth of these poetical forms, it will be at once observed that the facts we have noticed co-exist with certain universal conditions of thought, which limit the imagination of the individual poet. Of these the most potent is the Education of the Church. With the exception of Chaucer, Gower, and James I. of Scotland, every poet of mark before the time

of Surrey seems to have been brought up with a view to the Church as his profession, and even those who are excepted show in a marked manner the effects of the training they have received. All of them love to display their encyclopædic learning. All of them cite with deliberation the authorities from whom their learning is derived; and the far-reaching influence of certain text-books in general use—particularly Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology*, Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturæ*, a large variety of *Physiologi*, besides the works of the greater Fathers such as St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory —is always apparent in works of imagination. All of the specially mediæval poets again write with a more or less theological aim, and formulate their learning by means of the logical system prevailing in the Schools.

Next to education the most powerful force, in the production of modern poetical forms, is the existing code of Feudal Manners and Institutions. The bard or minstrel is himself an essential part of the fabric of tribal society, and he naturally moulds his inventions, oral or literary, to meet the changing tastes of his audience. Hence, as we have seen, arise successively the forms of the *lied* or *lay*, the *chanson de geste*, the *roman;* the lyrics of the troubadours adapt themselves to the requirements of the Courts of Love; and, at a later period, the sentiment of these institutions, allying itself with the genius of the Schools, produces the type of the chivalrous allegory.

Finally, the Drama, in its infant form, is the direct product of religious Ritual; the festival of Corpus Christi becomes as powerful an instrument as the Dionysia at Athens for the encouragement of the actor's art.

But while the principal forms of modern poetry have their origin in the ecclesiastical and feudal character of the Middle Ages, they are gradually modified by the whole movement of society towards a Civil standard of life and thought. The course of this history has shown how the minstrel, once the retainer and panegyrist of the tribal chief, was forced by the march of events to look for the

patronage of a more popular audience; how he invented the form of the *fabliau* for the amusement of his hearers in the city; and how from this germ grew the varied interest of the *Canterbury Tales*. The allegory, the offspring of theological thought, is put, as time goes on, to secular purposes, and, dropping its spiritual sense, comes to be regarded as mainly serviceable in the machinery of city pageants, or for court mumming and masking. In the drama, the tendency of the poet to rely more and more on the direct imitation of nature is caused by an alteration in the taste of the audience, which, forgetting the original didactic object of the play, becomes absorbed in the human interest of the plot, and in the exhibition of the characters of the men and women involved in it. In every direction, what may be called the "political education" of everyday life prevails over the stereotyped form of ecclesiastical education; and this natural movement in society itself is accelerated by the growing influence of the great classical authors, who reflect the genius of the free civic life of antiquity.

We are about to enter upon times when individual character stamps itself with increasing distinctness on the face of poetry. In the presence of the Renaissance, grown to vigorous maturity, it will be always well to bear in mind, that the great instruments of poetical expression were formed in the Middle Ages. The words of Burke are ever memorable and true: "After all with this Gothic and monkish foundation (for such it is in the groundwork) we may put in our claim to as ample and early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature, which have illuminated the modern world as any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of the improvement was our not despising the patrimony of our forefathers." [1]

[1] Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

END OF VOL. I

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